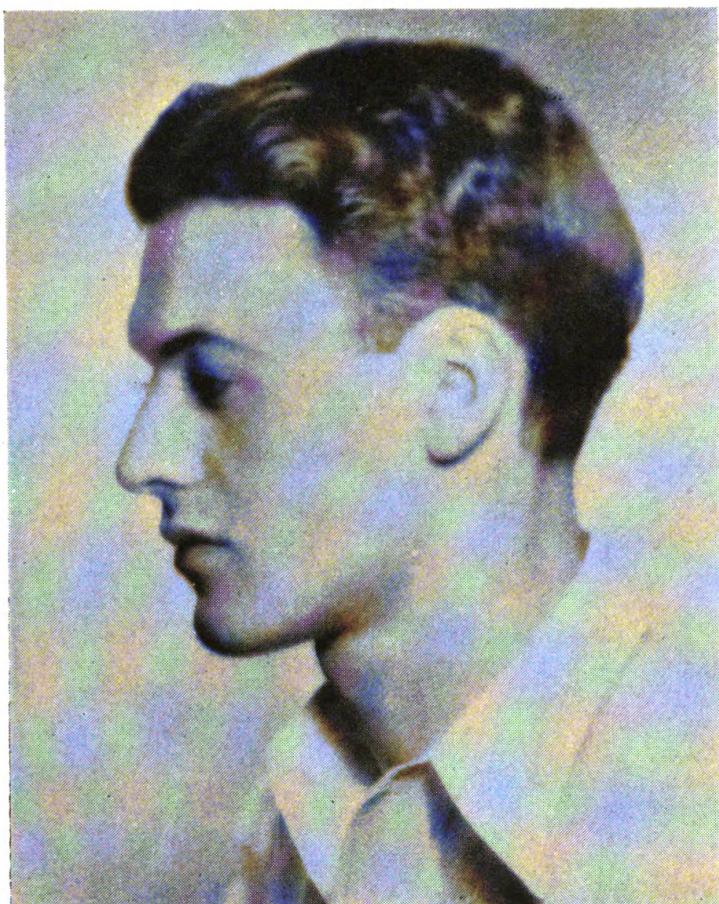


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“I dream of the day . . .”



"I Dream of the Day..."

LETTERS FROM
C A L E B M I L N E

AFRICA, 1942-1943

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The essence of a man is never physically visible. Because of his few letters to me, and these to his mother, I can say that I knew Caleb Milne, and knew the best of him. That best is something choice and beautiful.

This collection of his letters seems to me of permanent value, far beyond their satisfying of our avidity for news of the working of the minds of men who are fighting, for us, our battle. They reveal a rare soul, who passes on to us his own sensitive perceptions of the beauty and glory of living; and they are written in the style of true Belles-Lettres.

One feels humble and a little frightened that such a man has died for us, untimely. So much of the writing of men actively in the war has that impact. They love life, they see so clearly what is good and what is bad, and seeing intimately the base in man, they are hopeful of the good. The responsibility on us who survive is overwhelming. We have been through this too often, always with the trust "that these our dead shall not have died in vain." What does it take to teach us? How and when shall we learn? Shall we continue to kill off our Rupert Brooke's, our Joyce Kilmer's, our Caleb Milne's, and be as stupid as before?

Young Milne wrote of the death of one of his comrades, "I have always felt the pain exists only for the bystanders. I don't understand life, so naturally death seems very simple to me." None can understand life. It is given to the wisest only to appreciate the gift of life. This he did, and the stirring record is here.

MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS

“I dream of the day . . .”

1

May, 1942

ONE OF THE FELLOWS just came in to say goodby. It is strange how embarrassing it is to make farewells; he blushed and I stammered and we each said "Good Luck" several times but somehow there is a blank feeling in saying goodby sometimes. I suppose it is because with many people we are only equipped for the usual. And when you part for such a definite and undeterminate number of years, an element of drama enters silently and we are embarrassed at having to be on a stage before each other. It would really be much easier if one could scream his farewells to a full orchestra like they do in opera. The noise and tension would cover up any shortcomings.

Knowing you so well, I wish that I could send you some jolly reassurance that everything will be all right. But, to be frank, I would not be so excited at going if I knew it would be all cream and sugar. You are familiar with my general outline of ideas, so let's just say that what will happen, will. Experience and human adventure have as much importance if they are disastrous or crippling, as when they are purely pleasant or optimistic. My curiosity and zest for living will be richly rewarded no matter what happens—and there are many chances that the trip and the work will be merely prosaic and routine. But being in *Africa* at last! What a wonderful thing that there are still places for me to go, new things to happen. I believe death would be that moment when there was no boundary

beyond one's tired self to run on to. No fresh fields to explore, no new ideas to stimulate and awaken one.

I have noticed that on radio broadcasts and in war-books, a great deal of space is given to a sort of announcement of "Why I want to go." I am not sure of my reasons. I am not foaming to bayonet anyone, nor am I embittered enough to throw precious life away for this momentary calamity that has spread like a disease over the world. I believe our side is somewhat "righter" in all truth, but it is hard for an open mind to clog with hate. If I am touched with certain ignorances or innocences then I should be forgiven for feeling this way. Perhaps had I seen these far-off horrors that enrage our friends so violently, then I too would cry for blood. But, after so many small injustices and daily callousnesses and cruelties, I am dulled to the circus atmosphere that prevails. If it is "eat or be eaten," well and good; but if I must be convinced that wild beasts are roaming the world, my intelligence revolts and another slogan, more grown-up and well-thought over, must be found.

In other words, the ultimate agonies of war are, to me, not unconnected Calvarys over the world; they are the ultimate, sickening florescence of a thousand indifferences, hates and greeds that my own country and people have *also* been guilty of, as well as those who kill and are killed.

I dream of the day when one may say, "I am a citizen of the world!" I have never had a provincial sense to much degree, and it seems stupidier and blinder than ever now to shout the old nationalistic battle-hymns when they have brought the world into such artificial and complicated chaos. Are people so strange to one another as that? Is the human soul, the mind of men, so alien one to another, that there is no place where the gods may meet? No, I cannot believe that. Perhaps the pure in heart are also lazy in heart and do not see where

their tin gods have led them until this maelstrom is in the sky, overhead.

And so, what reason can I give you for going? I who love the world and all its follies and unexpected sadnesses so well. If evil seems to me as interesting as good, I cannot charge off on the white banner of "The Cause," at least not with any right. If I am almost as guilty as the guilty ones, how can I set up a howl of righteous indignation? It is my personal misfortune to see things with an appallingly long range, (and in another sense it is my good fortune). If this far-embracing view is manifest in feelings that the unthinking deem "unpatriotic" I am sorry with all my heart. For that is just one more misunderstanding on the record. I believe that this type of outlook, in a necessarily too general sense at the moment, is the beginning of the brave new world we dream of. When our countries and our seas are so near and so interthreaded with a million cross-currents of mutual contact, how can we be an American or a German or an Indian?

I was thinking the other night: how can people go into war over and over again when they have only to stop and look to see that nothing was ever won, or lost, or held? It must be that the sum of human experience lasts only through one lifetime, our children must find it out for themselves. What a pity that the vast total of a lifetime can only influence one man's span of years!

So, I am going off to help the tired, carry the wounded, see the world, live my life. It isn't in the heroic mold at all; and yet I believe, with Euclid, that man is only a reed in the wind, and yet he is a thinking reed. And the thinking reed needs a strong wind to cut him loose from the familiar marsh. If leaving my marsh to venture into deep waters of our world means anything, then it means the wind is strong and I have been *thinking*.

2

June, 1942

WE LEFT from a pier in Brooklyn. After reporting to the American Field Service at 9 A.M. we counted baggage, stencilled names on bags and listened to speeches until noon. We were then excused until 5 P.M. by the anti-climax dept! Tony Stewart invited me to have a gala last meal with him which we had at the Plaza. We started with Old Fashioneds and proceeded right through their heaviest menu. It was a very hot day and the city was sizzling as we went back to the office. When we arrived, some of the lower number units were getting into various cars, driven by very snappy volunteer ladies in blue tailored jobs. About 8:30 P.M. we got into a sleek Packard convertible chauffeured by a much mescared Jewish beauty and in an hour were deposited on a huge wharf-warehouse out on Brooklyn Bay. We went through very elaborate customs inspection, censoring, etc. and at 10 P.M. finally mounted the long gang plank onto a strange ship. It was an oil-burning Danish cruise-boat that was only four years old and was well equipped for tropical conditions. Somehow they managed a full course dinner for us and then we attacked the great pile of belongings piled high in the main salon. By midnight we were more or less settled. I was bunked in a 6x10 stateroom with the only civilian aboard, a Canadian speech specialist who was on his way to lecture on a three year contract. The ship accommodated fifty-seven passengers comfortably—there were one hundred of us, this civilian, four plug-uglies who rumor had it were

famous guerrilla fighters, five marine technicians and a couple of volunteer workers. Consequently, the living, eating and lounging arrangements were quite strained.

About five the next morning there was a clang of bells, anchors heaved, hawsers whipped and tugs whistled. I jumped up and stood in the bow with the others. As dawn came up we pulled out into the Lower Harbor and the ocean. At noon we had formed our grouping and steamed off at the maximum speed of the slowest freighter. For a full week we were in sight of land. In the distance the white resorts would gleam across the water. Our escort circled about us continually while relays of planes accompanied us. The specters of sunken ships jutting out of the water gave a gloomy, uneasy atmosphere to this part of the trip. At night we'd heave to, till dawn. At one time we waited out in the straits off Key West for two days while fuel and water were ferried out to us. This spot was the hottest on the whole trip. We left there, doubled back a bit, and took very much the same route as I once took on a freighter (to South America). Three weeks later we pulled into a beautiful island harbor. It was almost a closed ring of wooded mountains, peaks and waterfalls. Smoke rose in the distance from native cottages and here and there a dirt road wound up the hills. We were there for three days and were allowed ashore one day from 5 A.M. to 4 P.M. Here the convoy was reassembled, some of the boats heading in different directions. Two large boats joined us.

Early one morning, after a heavy rainstorm, we received sealed orders to start and we set off. About two days later there was a startling, sudden clanging of bells on our ship and, waving farewell to the convoy, we slipped into full speed ahead. We left the others far behind by dusk, and from that evening with three weeks fast sailing, we did not even see another ship. Heretofore, having a doctor and small hospital on board we had al-

ways brought up the rear of the convoy so that in the event of emergency we could pick up and treat the survivors. Naturally this position at the rear was the most dangerous so we were not sorry to leave it, and it was a relief to go skimming ahead.

Our boat boasted a small, tile pool aft which was a great joy. But the Danish, British and French crew also used it and were none too fastidious. The decks normally assigned to lounge-chairs and open to the sky, were loaded with plane-crates and enormous packing boxes of tools and parts. Others of the boats carried teetering stacks of lumber, oil and food.

We were told that several times the King of Siam had chartered our boat for Court cruises. The original crew had had a wild time. The boat was in Marseilles when Denmark was invaded. The French took it over and sailed it southwards. It went all over the Far East and returned to Capetown. It was here when France (censored) they returned it to the care of the Danish men who now sail it for South Africa. This accounted for the motley crew. They had not even heard from their families for over two years.

Every day we assembled on deck at 9.30 A.M. First Aid for an hour in groups of eight, then drill an hour and calisthenics, with the ship sometimes plunging madly while we tried to keep in line. At 1 P.M. we lunched, then had French lessons followed by Arabic. At 4 P.M. I rehearsed the chorus for a show we're giving soon. It is very wittily written by Le Boutillier. There is an amazing orchestra composed of half-caste greasers, costumes of sheets and pillow-cases, a male chorus, three scenes and endless hilarity.

Each Sunday at eleven, we have an open service in the lounge for any who wish to come. The meeting is run and read by a Jew, a Quaker, a Baptist, a Moslem, a Scientist

and an Episcopalian. It is very touching somehow, and to me an impressive hour. Next Sunday I am reading some of your Marcus Aurelius, which is a source of much pleasure to me for many reasons, later leading into practical application of some of Marcus' philosophy.

The Group is an interesting mixture of people, thank God. Wonderful books on board and fellows who have been abroad at school most of their lives. I'd say twenty-eight is the average age although we have one who must be sixty. We all do our own laundry, and washing in salt water is a real job.

I will be glad to be on terra firma again, not only for security, but to see trees and be still at last from vibrations. I almost forgot to tell you we have the captain's wife on board, her canary, the purser's Dachshund and a Boston Bull who wears a life-preserved collar! It is amazing to hear the canary accompanying the victrola records on a hot afternoon with the dogs barking in the distance. The lady never appears but through every known kind of binoculars her back is studied by everyone.

At this writing we are about halfway on the big jump and life is a bit boring after five weeks. We round up our First Aid with a three-day examination next week. We are approaching the cool season now that we are traveling downward. It is pitch dark at 7 P.M. after a quick sunset of about fifteen minutes. Always a cool breeze and no humidity such as we experienced in such stupifying doses nearer home. We lose twenty minutes every other day which is a bit confusing.

Our last, and only, shore excursion was beautiful and enormous fun. We landed in launches at 7 A.M. and spent the whole day exploring the town, the magnificent mountains rolling above and the lushest, most vivid tropical flowers growing everywhere. Fuchsias as large as your fist, orchids on trees, heavy-scented hedges, bougainvel-

lia, lemon trees dropping with fruit and over everything that curious acrid wood-smoke of the hot countries.

Here I am with the ship riding anchor in Capetown Harbor. There are so many boats here that we may not go ashore for two or three days, since docking space is very important. Our Captain, however, has been in town to see what we do next, from the British Commanding Officer, and is supposed to wire the office that we have arrived.

After so long a time upon the water, it is heartwarming to see land again, and to realize that these mountains looming across a mile of pale green water are the very farthest outpost of civilization down here. They sheer up abruptly almost out of the sea, ruddy brown, and seamed with fissures and age, allowing only a mile or so at their feet for the rambling city to stretch itself along the curving shore. At places the mountain, or rather the 3000 ft. plateau of high land, crumbles away and a triangular peak rears itself against the cold pale blue sky. One monumental pyramid of rust-colored hill looks very Egyptian and almost man-made, very ancient and massive. The white sanded shore curls far below peppered with yellow and white brick houses, three and four stories high. In the other direction, native quarters melt into the distance. From the ship's rail the city looks austere, clean, and somehow devoid of any history, being in just two colors.

Since the sun is focusing on your end of the world now, it is winter here. By 6:30 it is black night, with everything in complete blackout. The sun goes down with a quick businesslike sunset. The air is quite damp and mist is apparent in the mornings. The Equator is not necessarily the hottest spot, as I had thought, but merely the center line between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. When the sun is revolving above the Equator you have summer. So it is hottest in Capetown when you are

coldest in New York for the sun is then revolving below the Equator. It is midnight here when you are at 5 P.M.

* *
*

It is three days later and I am sitting in the Canteen Club in Capetown looking out an enormous, many-paned window upon a little Dutch square. A statue of Queen Victoria and another of General van der Bosch are almost hidden by a great, thick, green trees with shiny fat leaves that glisten in the rain. The wet, windy air has soaked Victoria until she looks quite mulatto, so stained and dull looking.

We have been at an outlying camp since landing, but the little narrow-gauge railway, with doors opening out from every compartment is convenient, and there is a military bus to and from camp to station.

I love the city. Last night we went to a symphony concert which sounded like music from heaven. It probably was mediocre but I've never been so grateful for music before. There are flower stalls all around the town and one square is devoted to fresh cut flowers. Violets larger than our violas and twice as sweet, great bunches of eight-pronged narcissus, calla lilies which grow wild in every open field, bird of paradise five feet long, heather in stiff branches, enormous daisies, calendulas and freesias. There is a charming long graveled walk called "the avenue" which reminds one of Baden or Munich; the art gallery, museum, and bird-houses, Governor's palace and city schools facing it with thick gardens, winding ferny walks, and very rococco walls and gates bordering it for about three-quarters of a mile. Nearly everyone, men and women, are in uniforms, and from all over in every outfit you've ever dreamed of. The combination of Dutch and

English in the civil life is rather charming. But, oh, the snobbery, and all the caste-system!

We expect to board a fast through boat soon which will be a relief as I hear the rest of the trip gets hotter and hotter.

* * *

Orders came through and we were marched onto the quay in a drizzle of rain to a huge wall of gray paint towering overhead which proved to be our ship. The confusion and crowding on board was indescribable. We were all on one corridor so kept a certain unity but there were just six cabins for our group of one hundred. Water was turned on three times each day for an hour, and those times coincided exactly with our meals; seven, eleven-thirty and five-thirty. The showers were permanently shut, the drainage being out of order. There were alleys eighteen inches wide in the staterooms in which to stand, pass, dress and put luggage for sixteen men. Besides this the overpowering, wet, heat of the Red Sea and locked port-holes. Dear God, what a trip!

Three days out all of us in the Officers' Mess got serious ptomaine poisoning from bad tongue. If we were wretched, the troops were worse. As I wrote you we are extended officer's courtesy which, under our present patron, is *vastly* different from the common herd. Even though on the greener side of the field, I often questioned "democracy" especially as it is practiced around here.

After nearly three weeks of this we reached the end of our sea-odyssey. Ten weeks! I think so often of the mountains and Woodstock. Being able to remember so vividly every stone and flower and tree on both places, I am able, when things get rough, to walk through the house, then out on the porch, through the garden and into the woods, with no mental effort at all. Sometimes in

the blackout and the claustrophobia that overtakes the sanest of us, it is wonderfully soothing to be walking through the garden with you, in imagination. For life here has not been a bed of roses!

3

August, 1942

I KNOW IT IS SILLY, but I feel so very low to have arrived and no news from you. As you can imagine letters from you, and the little things you say, are the difference between feeling on the other side of the world and seeming not so irrevocably far away from all the secure, pleasant beflowered world of iced tea, fresh food and baths. Forgive this outburst. I am tired. I only hope the letters are not at the bottom of the sea.

Well, here is the next day and, having slept like a log, I feel refreshed and quite cheerful again. I've just been over to our Field HQ. tent and found I had been cabled fifty dollars. How wonderful! I don't know who sent it but I daresay it was you. I have come through such a welter of shillings, florins, piastres, ha'pennies, and ducats that my usual precise financial abilities are quite confused. The ability to buy various articles is very strange here; many simple things are unheard of, many stocks are long sold out and the enormous influx of people in these parts has resulted in a locust-like scourge on supplies.

When we landed we were packed into open lorries at the pier, our baggage in others and the officers in a vacant ambulance. The Brigadier had said in his speech at the pier that we were officially volunteers attached to the Eighth British Army. "We welcome you to the Eighth Army, we welcome you to the Middle East, we welcome you to Egypt." He said it so impeccably, the Old Yorkshire Pudding with his pink cheeks. He might have added welcome to the Western Desert, to the green flies and

the brackish water, to the blood and to the sand, to the noise and the waiting. Yes, and to be fair, welcome to the friendships and the urgencies, to cigarettes and strangers, to laughter and camaraderie.

All afternoon we drove and drove and drove. The sun was blazing, the country turning to shimmering sand wastes, undulating towards distant blurred horizons. Along the tarred highway solitary donkeys trotted along with triple rows of gilt bangles jingling over their muzzles, their hooded riders lolling back on red saddles. Women swathed in black filed past, their eyes enormous with kohl circles. As we traveled the air grew hotter and hotter and even the tearing breeze of our transit burnt as it cooled. Occasionally, the road would dip gently into a hollow, filled with palms; dates hanging in great castanets of reddish black beneath the fronds. Then on up the oily ribbon of road stretching ahead into a curved infinity. Now and then lorries and equipment lumbered by; then the increased traffic indicated a camp ahead. We passed several punishment camps, for British offenders, and a barbed wire enclosure for Italian and German prisoners. At each corner a dizzy wooden "fire-tower" housed an armed guard.

We stopped once for a quick you-know-what and then started off again. Some fellows were lobster-color by this time and lying on the floor of the truck. By six o'clock we had been traveling along a little canal for an hour or so. This Sweetwater Canal was dug 2000 years ago. Following the road to Cairo it links the Suez Canal to the capital. Like a toy river it flows placidly along, nourishing a strip of caledon green fertility along both banks. Here corn and squash grow rampant in the rich, wet earth, the golden tassels topping the fragrant yellow squash blossoms in the sun. Waving clumps of pampas grass send their mauve standards from out the muck, while convoys of small white herons feast in the by-pools. Like a minia-

ture Nile, the canal brings life-giving strength to the sandy waste of the province. By the road eucalyptus trees looking like our silver willows swayed in the heat. The native farmers use a rough tree-crotch for a plow, using a camel, a donkey, a horse or their relatives for pulling power. The slowness and uneven methods result in waving lines in the rich, watered earth, but each inch along the waterways is made to produce.

Every mile or so there is a village on the far side of the canal aloof from the traffic that tears along the tarred highway. Before each village wall stretches a distance of bisque-colored earth. Beyond the main gate in the wall can be seen glimpses of fluted balconies and spiraled minarets. The village alleys twist tortuously into the secret heart of the town. Closed louvres and shuttered doors stare unknowing at the outer world.

The dhows are boats, very flat and prowed abruptly like a cobra-hood, painted in fantastic designs, with a high rough mast and tilted bar to which is lashed the whitened sails. They lie low in the water, very much like an inverted flat scoop, the bow being an abrupt upturn. This gives the dhows a pouter-pigeon appearance, the painted breast puffing out to defy the harmless little wavelets that the placid canal throws up. Parallel to our highway and fringed with grey-green trees, these minute waterways wend their smooth way. The natives stand nude along the grassy hillocks soaping themselves with dark rags. Occasionally, someone calmly evacuating along the roadside waves gaily to passersby.

We are now camped on a vast sand-and-pebble plain. As far as the eye can see, the tent roofs lie, roped to the earth. They are not set up in any formation which causes the tracks and faint roadways to curve and slink about the plain. The tents are loosely grouped and not very near each other. Ours is about 25 x 15 with thick bamboo poles, capped with globes of beautifully tied rope, to sup-

port the ridge-line of the roof. The sides sweep down in a long octagon to meet the walls which are 5 ft. high. Outside, the bamboo wall-poles are roped to pegs in the sand, giving the tent a tentacled appearance. We have ample water for drinking and of course for tea at all three meals. These take place at eight, one and six. Today we had a raw cucumber, an onion, a slab of corned beef, a slice of whole wheat bread, jam, butter and tea. All fruits and vegetables are first washed in potassium permanganate solution. *It has never rained here.* The ground is like a mushroom-colored talcum, six inches deep in places and soft as velvet. The breezes sift whole clouds of golden dust across the land giving the vistas a soft, luminous aspect that has its own beauty. The very austerity and bareness are lovely at times, especially at dawn and dusk.

Our training officers are desert veterans and very congenial men. We will move on by the time you are reading this to relieve others ahead. It is strange to see life being lived so near the holocaust. When air raids come rockets are sent into the sky, the color indicating the type of raid. Overhead in the daytime great hawks whirl in the sky and float low over our heads. My ambulance which carries the American manufacturer's number, the British Army license, and an Arabic statement, has four-wheel action which is necessary for sand and soft earth. The gear shift is very different from my Mercury being four speeds plus reverse (way over to the right). There are two brown leather seats forward that pitch up if wanted. Behind them a space of nine feet, two padded benches hinged on either side and four stretchers folded up, a tool box, fire extinguisher, opening-out doors and a let-down step on the rear. The ceiling has two lights, a wire ventilator and fan, and four straps of khaki webbing that hold the outer stretcher handles when all aboard are flat cases (two on the floor, two on the straps). We have had to

reduce our equipment to the very minimum on active service which means many items are in storage in Cairo. Can you imagine living, eating, sleeping, washing, writing, thinking and existing in the back of your station-wagon? It is fantastic, but such is the resiliency of human nature that one adjusts oneself. There are certain times though, when the combination of heat, discomforts, thirst and general confusion of orders is almost too much. I stop then and close my eyes a minute and think of the Saw-kill, or one of Maugham's good, concise short stories, or some well-executed Brahms, and soon I feel superior and well again. We joke and talk bad French and pretend the next fork in the dust-track is Voisin's Café and invite each other to the most elaborate suppers. And somehow the bad spots fade off and evening falls at last. We are officers (bastard version) but seem to be thrown with the Tommies mostly out here. It is very much like a mechanized gypsy caravan full of Harvard grads, glamour boys and career men. But nearly all of them easy to get along with, and congenial. A few have the outlook of Peck's bad boy, but the majority are mature and quite dependable. It takes all kinds! The main fault, perhaps the only one, is that few of the fellows have ever known responsibility or adversity, or faint heart.

A canteen tent has opened with a joint committee of A.F.S. and British soldiers to supervise it. Here from eleven to one every day, and after supper, we can buy beer, English and South African cigarettes, and Heinz's soups at forty cents a can. We can also draw on our small but excellent library that is an enormous cheerer-upper to all of us. It is heartening to be able to choose "The Flowering of New England" in a desert that never flowers; to re-read "The Story of San Michele" with all its Neapolitan and Parisian horrors, to meet Proust again and the civilized infidelities of Odette de Crecy. I am quite happy. I miss hot baths and showers, true; but all this sun and

dry air with the magnificent spangled stars and soft Eastern sunsets is very lovely. Our food is bare and rough, though it tastes good in the open. If I had to eat it within four walls I guess I'd throw it out the window.

4

CAIRO

CAIRO is a most glamorous spot in peacetime and with the excitement and tension of the war it has a strange thrill that is very interesting. The prancing little Arabian pairs on all the fiacres, the clipped trees lining the boulevards, strange uniformed Eastern men, Arabs in white, women in khaki, officers and street-vendors; it is exactly like a movie. Shepherd's Hotel looks like the Saratoga ones, all red plush and very wide corridors. Outside a woman's orchestra plays waltzes, everyone is gay or weary, the four bars in the hotel are crowded and the clerks are busy being rude to the overflow. It is inconceivable that a few miles away—oh, well, we're told not to discuss things very deeply. The tailoring is certainly impressive, anyhow!

The Bazaar of Cairo. How can a page covered with small black marks, decipherable but flat, ever hope to convey all of the crawling commerce, the high color, the seething strange cauldron of secrets that spill riotously from these twisting little streets? There is a spell that seeps into one's mind, the deeper into the quarter one goes. It has no name, it has no end nor beginning, it is pure feeling.

Taking a fiacre I left behind the cosmopolitan boulevards, the gin-slings of Shepherd's, the pomposities of Farouk's royal taste to enter the heart of Cairo. The narrow streets, the excuses for pavements are both jammed with Moslems. Street-hawkers scream harshly at passersby, the horses press ahead into an increasing melee

of donkeys and people, carts jolting over obscene gutters, women pausing at a scarf-seller's booth, and hawk-nosed Arabs magnificently swaggering. Now and then the street bellies out into an ancient lime-stone square filled with fiacres and peddlers, pausing in the loud sunshine. Then back to the narrow confine goes the street heading like a serpent for the bazaar. The houses on either side, sandwiched with tiny shops, begin to close in, only a strip of Egyptian blue is visible overhead. No foreigners saunter by. The crowded pavement flows over into the busy street. From all sides press in the strange odors of the halveh-rooms and the bitter roastings of black coffee-beans. Strings of prayer-beads hang swaying, cheek-by-jowl with glittering bangles catching the sun's rays. There is an intolerable, growing excitement. The little fiacre moves on slowly, a few feet further on it stops. It is the end of the drive, the beginning of the Bazaar. I stepped into the crushing street between two acrid-smelling wine shops, past a slumbering dog. An alley twisted ahead, I turned abruptly through an old painted gate into the Bazaar. The past was before me.

Around me the richness of the East, and the tawdry Western merchandise lay helter-skelter. Piles of oriental rugs flaunted their deep reds and blues at my elbow. Above long necklaces of soft gazelle-skin slippers hung across the path, motionless in the noisy air. A donkey pushed me aside gently as she minced by carrying a flimsy crate of squawking fowl. Beside me the open shelves of glowing ruby glass, gobleted and bowled, feast-ing the eye, already numb with color. Curio-sellers rub shanks with the passing merchants. A Greek from Sparta deals in great batches of tiger and leopard skins and the ecclesiastical fragments of frankincense. The curing of the slaughtered skins blends with the benedictions. Little carved balconies hang overhead. Nearby an old case full of scarabs, cold and stony, is in charge of a young Kurd.

He stares dully at the passersby, almost as dead as his mummy tokens.

The alley turns and doubles back a bit straggling down three steps onto another main thoroughfare. Huge baskets of scarlet mangoes, blackening figs and green pistachios, roasted in rock sugar, buzzing with glistening flies. Inside the next door-way, dark and pungent, a suave merchant dangles necklaces and strings of amber knobs, clouded and dull. From all through the East by camel, donkey and train, these strewn heaps of luxury have found their way into this tortuous labyrinth of the Bazaar. From overhead the screech of caged birds joins the cries of the sandaled merchants. "Look up here," the cockatoos scream. "Look down here," implore the shopkeepers. I looked up. In the jagged slit of sky, against the noon-time air I saw the airy elegance of a white minaret with lacey balconies looking insecure and toy-like against the bright blue.

I had made but three or four turnings since quitting the carriage and already was lost. My thoughts were interrupted by a girl, slight of figure bearing an emaciated baby, naked but for a tin ring on one tiny ankle. She plucked my sleeve and then pulled her veil away from her long-lidded eyes of kohl to bare her face. A gasp of horror and revulsion escaped me. Most of her mouth and all of her nose was eaten away. She pulled the crepe into place deftly and once again her lovely eyes looked out, alluring. She gave the baby a pinch to make him cry and then extended a henna-palmed hand, mumbling some words through her decayed lips. I pulled out a piastre, unable to look away but terrified by her closeness. In a moment she had moved on and I stood there stupidly staring at a row of exquisite rose and gold flacons. Such is the pattern of a day. For every intriguing vista a horror, for every rose a sore. Schopenhauer says it is only the blind who believe in the beautiful. Perhaps it is only the beautiful who are blind.

ALEXANDRIA

WE WERE UP in the cold morning air by half past six. We ate a hasty breakfast beside the campfire and soon, in slightly wrinkled but clean clothes we climbed in the lorries for our first day in Alexandria. The trip covered about sixty kilometers and is said to take two hours. Since the usual traffic whizzed by our camp at forty miles this seemed a long time to allow for so short a journey. But after a few minutes mad hurtling in the springless lorry the traffic on the road increased. The line would advance at a reasonable speed, then pull to a sudden stop throwing us in unpremeditated embrace upon the floor! Cursing the driver, who no doubt did not relish these surprise crashes himself, we would struggle to our feet, and readjust our headgear at the proper military angle.

At Amarya there is a split in the black road. A military policeman in a red hat and white muslin sleeve-covers, looks inquiringly at each approaching chauffeur to ascertain which branch of the road is desired. Behind him two white sign posts point in opposite directions. On the right reads "Alexandria—7 kilos." On the other sign is written "To the Western Desert." On one side the white balustraded city, filled with green gardens, French restaurants, Chinese curios, high-heeled women and swaying curtains. On the other the desert, destruction, the glare of the sun and the darkness of death, swallows of precious water, and the din and dust. What a decision to make! How often must the young heart beating within the greasy

khaki cover-alls stop, hesitate, rebel. What moments of momentary struggle must battle at that spot on the dark, tarmac road. On one side, lovely life and Alexandria dormant—on the other the screaming wastes of the Western Desert. Nobody wants to die.

If you could only see Alexandria! I dare say I see it through an accumulative haze of history and legend which colors it, especially for me. As many of the fellows see only dirty, un-American qualities, but even they fascinate. Of course, Alexandria, right on the blue, blue Mediterranean is a rich seaport. Parts of it seem like Havana, the large marble plazzos of the wealthy Greeks, Italians and Syrians; the high-walled gardens, clipped trees, wrought iron, new imposing squares and statues and the French shops. Sailors everywhere in white, musical-comedy costumes, Arabs in fezzes, Greeks in kilts, Tommies in khaki and women in black shrouds. Cafés and tea shops on the sidewalks, tubs of trees and trays of pastry. Through it all the nervous tension and the tired faces, the hurried sexuality, and the indifference of the natives, the swagger of the troops and the old Eastern culture raffiné and weary. It is maddening to have so little time to prowl around; but on returning to camp, I always seem to have seen a thousand sights that the others, sitting all day in the Hotel Cecil bar, have missed! Aren't Americans funny? So many people have been appalled that I like it out here.

Alexander Dumas said there was more drama in a closed door than in any play—and with my fertile, curious imagination and all the lowered closed windows about these cities, I am going rampant!

6

IN SEARCH OF SANDY

At 9 A.M. the eight of us climbed into Spook Wallace's ambulance. The cook-wagon had made up a tin canister of food for us and we were not expected back until after suppertime. We drove back along the Alexandria road for approximately twenty miles then at a marker on the desert side, we pulled off the highway and set out into the desert.

Six months previously this area had been a horrible testing ground for the Indian and New Zealand troops. Retreating from the German advance toward El Almein, they were ordered to take up a line at this point to hold the Nazi tide back while troops were evacuated behind them. About a dozen American Field Service ambulances were working with these men. They formed a long line, the Indians up toward the Mediterranean, the New Zealanders further south, below them more Allied Troops stretching down to the Quatarra Depression. The thin line held out for hours but finally the Germans drove a wedge above and below the New Zealanders. In effect this push-through, connecting behind them, isolated the New Zealanders completely. To add to the ghastly situation, the terrain in this area is very Colorado, very flat, limitless plains with a great escarpment running north-south, a veritable cliff sixty or seventy feet high which juts out here and there over the westerly plains, forming deep gullies and rocky notches. Once on the top of this unique ridge, the conqueror dominated the sprawling desert area below.

Manning Field, our N.C.O., was one of the AFS men assigned to these New Zealanders at that time. Consequently, as we drove along he recognized many landmarks and situations which made map-reading en route unnecessary.

When the troops were encircled, their plight was indescribable. Overhead, the German planes bombed and shelled them. From the high spots the Nazi machine guns and nests showered fire upon their encampments, and the roving tank patrol played havoc with their outer defenses. Within the area, a decision had to be made. They were cut off on both sides from their Allies by the Nazi push-through, pouring in upon them were the advancing enemy, already behind them the German pincers had closed. As on an island, the New Zealand troops and the AFS men were marooned. Petrol, water, food, in the order of their importance, were growing scarce, their numbers were being cut down hourly by the Axis raiding. Then the commanding General decided to stake everything on a break-through. It was just possible that under cover of darkness, enough could get through to make the dash worthwhile. At ten o'clock that evening, the harried troops were ordered into eight long, streaming, lines. Tanks, water wagons, Brenn-gun carriers, men, staff cars, ammunition lorries—all were spread out and formed into the least vulnerable arteries of traffic. At eleven o'clock in the pitch black Egyptian night, the huge column, eight abreast, began to move off slowly to one side.

The command had chosen the weakest spot in the encirclement by the Germans. Here the New Zealanders concentrated their fire, which did not attract special notice for a time, inasmuch as gun shots were, and had been, continuously going off for days. By the time the Germans realized that, in the dark, their captives were making a getaway, half of the New Zealand forces had

pulled out of the circle, thanks to the heroic action of their advance gunners who cleared a path for them.

All night they traveled and throughout the next day, twenty-six hours after leaving Bir el Serena they pulled into the C.C.S. But soon after leaving their deadly spot, the man in charge of the ambulance pulled them up hurriedly in the dark and while seven columns rumbled past in the ominous, choking invisible dust, he went from door to door, checking the American drivers. Everyone present and accounted for except one car and its driver. He was never heard from again, nor did the enemy in later communications ever admit that he was a prisoner-of-war.

One day in November, Captain Marsh received a letter from two AFS fellows who were prisoners in Italy. Toward the end of the ragged page one of them had written: "We hear Sandy is in a prison not far from here?" This curious remark, half statement, half question started rumor going again. Where was Sandy?

Under wartime conditions, communications between two armies is very difficult: but even so, there had been ample time, and no reason against our having received word that, if he was still alive, he was a prisoner somewhere in Europe.

Today's reconnaissance, then, was to comb over this battleground, only three weeks back in the possession of the Allies after a whole summer under German control, to see if we could find any trace of the man.

We drove straight in along a decrepit line of telephone poles, occasionally a car would pass us. Finally we saw a camel or two in the great distance and no sign of human life. Towards noon we saw a dozen vehicles ahead more or less grouped in a large flat area. We drove up to them and discovered each one had been hit by a land-mine. On looking about us, we saw a wire fence battered but still recognizable stretching around us on three sides.

Along the front where we had made our entrance a row of empty beer bottles had marked the fourth side of the square. We had driven directly into the mine-field!

Notations

I found a truck in the distance full of black wool. The dead man with broken legs—the group-graves of New Zealanders—slit trenches.

Wonderful lunch, Italian peas and string beans and Nescafé. We separate. On the cliffs looking down—the Italian car that had crashed the New Zealand gun-carrier—an arm—another body—débris on the gravel.

We wind our way back to the others. Decide to bury the soldier. 4 P.M. sunset. Siwa Road—home.

WHAT A DELIGHT to receive your three letters. The news of Woodstock and the annual meteor-watch was hungrily absorbed, believe me. Though there is so much for me to assimilate here, such a profusion of new sights and sensations and philosophies that being lonely is out of the question—still, it warms the heart to know how my fond world is faring, and what is happening at home. “Partir c'est de mourir un peu,” as Mrs. Miniver reminisced. I am fascinated by this burning country. It is so absolutely dry that one sweats very little and there is even a sort of intoxication in the golden heat. The vistas are so long that they attain an unearthly, hazy quality which is accentuated by the luminous filter of powdered dust, as if a gauze was pulled across a skeleton. The stars are splendid and dusk is cool and highly colored. We sauntered home after supper at six, mess plates dangling and a welcome cigarette soothing the rough food.

Every Wednesday we are allotted Victory cigarettes, of unrecognizable tobacco. It is generally agreed that a proportion of tobacco and a soupçon of camel dung enter their preparation. This may be fickle rumor. They are made by Godfrey Phillips, Ltd. of India and I hope this firm sold them to the government at an excessively fair price. If they did not they should have donated them to the Cause. The curses that spill forth daily upon lighting these cigarettes will be sufficient to damn him and his heirs and assignees forever.

The trucks and motorcycles are resting and only an occasional plane glints across the radiant sky. The sun, an impossible huge orange ball, rests on mauve, pink and lavender clouds just above the distance and the whole sky is delicately deepening, bathed in blues that blend into the sunset. How often I've looked overhead to think that the same stars and moon were lightening your sky, only seven hours later!

Like Bedouins, our tents are standing about, the door-flap swaying in the breeze. We usually keep one section of the wall open, but stretched with netting to allow plenty of air to come through. Now I know why part of my equipment was mosquito netting! Most of the men sleep on canvas stretchers, with blankets and bed-rolls, and canopied quite royally with crowns of mosquito nets. Some of it is black, some yellow, some white, so there is a difference of color as well as of draping. When available we have covered the sand with cheap matting, while overhead undulates a kerosene lamp. The tent is also lit with candles stuck in empty peach tins or Australian beer bottles. We have appropriated little split bamboo crates that they send cucumbers in. They are delicate and spindly and we call them "bed-side tables." Across from where I loll writing one of the fellows is deliriously emptying a small can of peaches. We get so little that is sweet that we get ravenous for desserts or candy. In exactly two weeks it will be my birthday (September 23rd) and I hope you will eat your heads off in my honor! Lots of rare meat and green salads!

I forgot to mention that always in the distance is the smoky spiral of twisters. These spouts are like inverted whirlpools and are amazing in their sharp outline, often being absolutely straight, tan, lines extending up into the clouds a mile or two. Yesterday our tent was engulfed in one. For a few minutes the ropes flapped madly, the air thickened violently, we could not see ten feet away and,

choking with dust, we clung to the bamboo poles to prevent our tent rising any more from the ground than it already was. At the end the spout skidded off impishly leaving every single thing heavy with dust. Our faces looked heavily powdered, our beds like crumbling tombs.

There is so much I would like to write you: the organization and the effort is vast, so inexplicably impressive out here in this nothingness. If you hear anyone complaining at home tell them the tires and gas and oil and food are out here working, and the things they are doing without mean life and refreshment here. I have seen many curious sights already and talked to dozens of varied strangers. I feel now that there is more sense to this conflict, not because of the old cliches and speeches, but simply because of listening to the thoughts of men. There will certainly be more of a change in *everything* afterwards than most people realize. The conflict is more than can be seen on the surface, believe me. I agree with Secretary Wallace, that "the coming century will belong to the common man."

LATE ONE NIGHT in the third week of October the order came through to start moving up. There was much excitement among us and many guesses as to how far into the blue we would be sent. We had become more or less used to the sound of bombs in the distance, interspersed with the crackling of anti-aircraft fire, the novelty had worn off but as yet we had seen no flashes nor been near enough to dodge the ping-ping of machine gunnery. Midst a babble of voices from the various ambulances I turned in having decided to pack my things in the early morning.

I woke in the pre-dawn flush of night. The water in my canvas bucket was icy cold and felt like melted snow to my sleep-ridden face. I emptied the bucket over my head (a calisthenic I would only submit to on some important occasion). I have always admired people who do not mind cold water down their necks and seem impervious to soap in their eyes. Feeling alarmingly awake I busied myself packing away my myriad small paraphernalia. We were doubly loaded with equipment. Beside the usual array of toilet kit, clothing, medicine and passportalia, was added the grisly but neat haversack of the gas-mask, the clanking mess kit and several shoulder bags of items rarely needed. These are charged against one's account with the British Empire and it is necessary to lose them gradually "on the field of action"; so that after a few weeks of campaigning the wise ones step ahead unburdened by much of the claptrap issued to them.

The main flaw in the perfection of my packing was an enormous camouflage net. This spread itself like an enormous seine crocheted with vary-colored burlap strips. It went over the entire ambulance, and dragged on either side though short in the front, like one of Gaby Deslys' entrance costumes. Contrary to popular opinion, the nets were not to hide the vehicles, they were designed to kill the shadow that it made. From the air their camouflage was well nigh perfect. The motors being sand-colored were almost invisible anyway, and the soft clinging nets nullified the sharp shadow until it melted into the Desert. I tried to stuff it into the back of the ambulance but its bulky sides would not give sufficiently. I pushed in vain like a cartoon of a guard trying to jam the fat lady through the subway door. I kicked it, I pushed it, I shoulered it and heaved it. The reward of my labor was a shower of sand and several scorpions scuttling away to safety. Finally I had to untie the rope around its middle and, like the above plump lady's curves released from her corset, the net obligingly gave way and we landed in a heap on the floor of the ambulance. I was lying there laughing when the breakfast bugle blew slightly off key and being of that select group that is convulsed by a sour note, I departed for the vats of scalding tea in paroxysms of mirth, all most disturbing to my tousled companions.

By eight o'clock I was pulled up in line ready to drive off. The ambulance traveled at intervals of a hundred yards, a distance I found it easy to compute by counting telephone poles. It was a fine cool morning. The puffy white clouds were rare for Egypt where low, still banks of pastel are more the custom. My ambulance had been oiled, greased, tanked up and every nut and bolt tightened before departure. The car hummed along at the satisfying, well-gearred purr that is so soothing to the driver's ears. Presently I began to sing, there is so little responsibility in driving in convoy; the pace is set, the

distance figured, the time-table predetermined, the direction mapped out. All you have to do is throw in the various gears and keep a foot on the gas pedal. Perfect conditions for arias: I sang "un bel di" at concert pitch and with all the feeling and pathos that I had become accustomed to on my recording by Madame Bori. Not having the slightest idea of what the Italian meant, my burst of emotion was purely imitative. I sang "Celeste Aïda" completely ignoring M. Verdi. I sang it as if Aïda were telling people how wonderful she was and not Rhadames praising her. I should have thought on this special morning, driving on the road from Cairo, almost within gunshot of the Pyramids, the setting for Aïda, the aria would have had an extra grandeur, but it sounded just the same as usual to me. Perhaps counting the telephone poles took away the Egyptian "schmaltz." At any rate, I was well into the next song, Brunhilda's Death Music, when the convoy suddenly left the road and headed into the Western Desert.

The road we took was known as the "T" track. It went out into the sand for eight miles. Because of the deep, treacherous sand the entire track was laid with metal nets. This resembled very much the strong wire mesh that is used to surround a city playground. It was approximately ten feet wide, lashed down with wires at each side, these cables being wound around heavy wedges driven deep into the sand. The sections of mesh were also lashed together, to form a continuous track. It was a two way road, one strip leading to the desert, a parallel one from it. In the center, and on both sides, grew the scraggly shrubs, gray-trunked and gnarled like Japanese etchings. Every half mile or so a few sections of wire were placed in the center panel, making one broad track for a space, in which disabled vehicles could pull off the road, or a mistaken lorry turn about. And it was amazing the num-

ber of vehicles, under methodical, military instructions that managed to take the wrong road.

The wire had warped and curled somewhat due to the daily usage of the center of each track. This gave transit over it an unworldly sensation as the edges were continually bending in a trifle to greet you in passing. It was very like the newsreels of that Seattle bridge that buckled in the storm, except that the desert did not sway from side to side.

There were painted signs along the way giving notice "T" track was for staff cars and ambulances only. We passed several autos crashing along, piled high with officers' luggage and driven by haughty military chauffeurs. It was obviously impossible to stop along this road for any but the direst emergencies. We passed over it at a merry clip, ending our meshed ride at an encampment that marked the beginning of the desert path. The great circle of vehicles assembled here formed around a Casualty Clearing Station which functioned as a liaison establishment between the great military hospitals in Alexandria and Cairo, and the convoys of wounded brought in from the desert camps. Ambulances attached to the forward units drove loads of casualties back to this point. Here, under more ample facilities for dressing, diagnosing and treating wounds, the stretchers were unloaded and the ambulances sent back into the desert. Other convoys would then carry the men into the cities, as the Medical Officer in charge directed. Thus it was in reality a clearing station for casualties. We pulled up here for a few minutes' rest.

9

Received November 9th, 1942

THIS LETTER will be in various sections, since the element of time becomes increasingly haphazard, and how I can post this is up to the gods. For we are now way out in the desert, in fabulously magnificent, bare country. We left the Road Monday and threaded our way into the sands. After about ten miles of driving we slipped down into a great basin of land stretching for miles in every direction. It was striped with long, low ridges of sand-ripple, bristling with gnarled shrubs, very gray-green. The sand itself became rose colored, dotted with bleached shells of thousands of snails, dazzling white in the sun. By noon we'd come upon a vacated camp-site and realized the unit we were to rendezvous had already moved further in. So, after a half hour for lunch of corned beef, biscuit and marmalade, on a pebbly slope, we headed into deeper desert. Crossing the great basin we saw in the distance a high plateau, turreted and crenelated with wind-worn mounds and peaks, all red and toast-color in the afternoon sun. The perspectives out here are so exaggerated due to the heat-shimmer and absolutely clear air that it seemed like an ancient citadel, crowning the rise in the plain. However, it took us three hours to reach it, so you can imagine the trickiness of vision here. We opened another tin of beef, I made a precious cup of Nescafé cooked over a sand and petrol fire, and munched on a few figs and by 7:30 was asleep. We rose at 6:30 the next morning and lurched off, still trailing our fugitive friends. By 10 A.M. we had circled

around, doubled our tracks, been over crags and gullies, taken compass bearings and stopped innumerable times. Finally, just before noon, we sighted our outfit and rolled into their bivouac. The Colonel in charge is very sticky about ample dispersal so we are thrown out over a vast area, no vehicle nearer than one hundred and fifty yards to a neighbor. We cook our own breakfasts and "tea" but have a hot meal at noon prepared at the cookwagon. Personally, I prefer my own meals.

The land is very lovely; not so much for itself (it resembles Arizona I am told), but in the wonderful play of light and color over the landscape. Some places the ground is paved with slabs of translucent rock like moonstone. Then you pass over large fields of broken apricot chips, softened into beautiful old-rose dust. The low hills are coated with lava formation and when the wind has eaten away the sand on a crest, the heavy pendulous frozen flow hangs in great rusty folds on the ridges. The hour before dawn is unbelievable, the whole East gently tinting in peach color, the night sky becoming bluer gradually and the big stars fade. Then the top of an enormous flame-colored sun touches the horizon and the endless miles of dust, with forked shadows, takes on an unearthly dull pink aspect. There are no streaks or sudden splashes as in our Northern sunrise, but intense, gauzy floods of color, with liquid golden clouds, absolutely still and soft and very oriental.

So here we are today, three days moving inland and still under five minute notice to push onward. I am still with the American Field Service of course, but we are becoming so absorbed in various Allied units that you never know where you'll be by nightfall. There are fourteen of us together at the moment. The noise increases every day, but the whole sensation is so unreal and exotic that it seems more like Wagnerian thunder-music. During the night a long caravan of lorries arrived but were on

their way again before sun-up. It is after eight now, and still they lumber past in the distance. It is nothing short of a miracle to get water and petrol out here in this ancient wilderness.

I do not know where we are going or for how long. Warfare is *liquid* in the desert, coming and going like water curling along a beach.

* * *

I am sitting up in the front of my ambulance looking out. As far as I can see the landscape is dotted with little black specks, some moving, others stationary. It seems odd to think they are huge tanks and trucks and men. I am continually feeling like some busy ant going laboriously forward to some ant battle. Battles should be fought in the nervous, artificial centers of civilization; out here they seem puny and man-made. In another fifty years who will care? Napoleon shot off the nose of the Sphinx on his Egyptian campaign, and that is all one remembers.

How amazing it is to think how far these thin sheets of paper will travel. I put them in a mail pouch here, a motorcycle or lorry drives them back a bit, another takes them to the city, then a train to a port, several boats or a plane I hope, then by train to New York City, another to Kingston, bus to Woodstock, then you walking down the drive with the autumn leaves swirling about your feet, and the dogs jumping about, except Hannah Poke who will be sedately at your heels, then you reach the mailbox!

The weather is like the middle of September at home. Last week, however, there was a pounding sandstorm and for twenty-four hours we lived in a cloudy driving miasma with the whole desert blowing and shifting about us. The Road was half covered.

Everyone thinks this time we will do it! Don't worry. I am so interested that I do not have time to be gloomy.

10

Received November 30th, 1942

WE ARE NOW in our sixth week here in the actual desert. Things seem to be going well but, as I said before, you are probably more up on the news than I am. Being in the fire, it is hard to see who's being burned. I am parked in a field that ten days ago was strictly German so I know there is some advance! There is an enemy camp to our right and behind us. It is situated on a small bulge into the sea and, in our advance was marooned as on an island. Consequently it sends little spits now and then not very effectively, but still a reminder to be careful. Last night, about 2 A.M., I was awakened by a pitter-patter of sharp noise and, opening my eyes, thought it was daytime. Overhead were bright magnesium flares, dropped from planes. These hang on little parachutes and are remarkably stationary and glaring. I don't know why they don't float down more quickly. They illuminate the ground beneath with a garish white light and enable the enemy to find their target. It is horrible to lie there exposed in the glare and wonder what next? But almost at once a *beautiful* spray of red tracer bullets arced across the sky followed by countless others, all criss-crossing and circling my ambulance. I lay on my stretcher up on one elbow to look out, wondering where the bullets were supposed to land, but none dropped on me, though I could hear the metallic ring on surrounding objects. I yelled out to ask my neighbor if he was alright in his slit-trench and he yelled back "Yes, pretty, isn't it?" So I went back to sleep. Later they came back and

dumped a string of bombs in the distance, but I did not waken.

This morning is cool. We are waiting to move ahead. Our section is split up again and I am to drive "Westward Ho" (name of ambulance) with a Medical Dressing Station we were working for a few days back. These stations leap-frog each other forward so every week we move up a notch we are likely to see some British fellows we had known before.

The moon came up last evening in layers of gray clouds and was continually sliding in and out, which added to the hazards of working. Can you imagine driving on a two-way track, completely without lights of any kind, in sand a foot deep? And with three stretcher cases groaning pitifully at every jolt. I knew they were morphined considerably, so tried to make the trip quick, rather than slow and easy. Somehow in the dark, with the earth trembling and the enormous sky continually flashing orange and white streaks, the battle is very near. It is ironic that you with your "Times" know a great deal more of what is happening than I do, only a few miles away. News is so garbled and second-hand that it is usually worthless to us. I understand things are going well and I hope so. Certainly there should be no excuse for failure this time with the great quantity of equipment moving up all the time. How beautiful a flock of gray planes are in the blue sunlight. They seem like determined moths zooming among the still clouds.

I am working at the moment from a Main Dressing Station where the wounded are patched up temporarily and eased as much as possible. What good sports most of them are! I feel a very real sense of brotherhood in this work. If only one would learn to be sympathico in the daily life. It is sad that this relationship comes as the result of catastrophe rather than the remedy for it. I have been interested in the ideas of the Tommies. I have talked

to hundreds that feel that a universal monies and a common tongue would help make a lasting peace.

We are stationed on a slight rise in the desert, quite flat, uninteresting country. It has been criss-crossed and used so much that it has a left-over quality. Indeed when we moved in two mornings ago, the land was peppered so closely with vehicles and men, that as they move up in the night, each dawn presents a different aspect. A road that was a congested highway last evening is little more than a powdered track today. And the way our destinations shift in a few hours is terrifying; you never know if the place you set out for is still there.

We are drawing rations in two day quantities now and doing all our own cooking. I try and shave every other day, and even wash occasionally. It is a real triumph to keep clean. They have just finished a lonely little burial service fifty feet from where I sit, and now are moving to another spot.

The sand is quite soft in this area which is a great help in digging one's slit-trench. We are ordered to do this and although I never use mine, it is ready outside. There is something dejecting to the human spirit, mine at least, to see a flock of men streaking across the land into a hole in the ground. Being a fatalist, perhaps I am too Olympian; but I seem to sleep through most attacks which will not surprise you!

* *
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Praise Allah, I have not mailed these pages yet! For a whole batch of mail arrived for me. What a gala moment it is! The first thing that fell from your letter was that maple leaf. It looked so lovely and scarlet in this gritty, beige world. I smelled it deeply and have been home for a minute.

11

YOU WILL REMEMBER I was sitting in my car waiting to move on in my last letter. We were kept dawdling for two hours which gave me a chance to walk over and look at an Allied plane near which I was parked. It was strewn over a wide area, and the remains had been quite thoroughly picked over by the troops stationed in the vicinity. I was told that the pilot had been a young South African who had been shot down two weeks before in flames. With these skeleton, fire-ravaged wrecks there is really very little to see. The motor had been thrown about thirty feet away, the wings ripped off and the inch-thick windshield was riddled with machine-gun fire. I kicked among the charred metal a few minutes, and was about to walk away when a white bit gleaming in the sun caught my eye. I stooped down to pick it up and saw three shining molars hanging on a burned strip of jaw-bone. Somehow I wasn't horrified until I saw a silver filling in one tooth and it all became so real.

A few moments later our train of vehicles started to crawl forward and I had to run and jump in to get my ambulance moving. We drove along, halting and edging forward in varying degrees of speed, never more than twenty miles per hour. The thoroughfares out here run parallel to the Coast Road which skirts the sea. Each track has a different name. Empty petrol tins, sometimes with a candle burning in them when the enemy isn't in the vicinity, are placed at intervals throughout the countryside, vague flickers for guidance. Every ten miles or so a wider

road cuts through to the Coast Road, this is parallel to the big Cairo-Alexandria Road. We followed one of these roads for miles due west. We ploughed along through vast deep ruts in the sand where tanks and trucks had moved the day before after the retreating Germans. There are mine-fields, both ours and the enemy's, in various spots which bottle-neck traffic terribly, as everyone must get back on the original roadway to pass through them. The mines look like round cymbals, laid under the sand, anything with 500 lbs. pressure explodes long strings of them placed helter-skelter on wires.

For hours the long columns groaned ahead. Staff cars running up and down. The high, old signal lorries trying to establish communications with forward units. Out of the big, wooden box-like trucks you'd hear voices yelling into short wave sets as you passed: "Hello, hello, hello. Calling Orange three! Calling Orange three! Do you hear me? Queen calling! Queen calling!" All code words, of course. We drove throughout that day and, towards sunset, with some of the convoy diverted into the side fields for the night, the traffic lightened a bit. It was still, however, far worse than Labor Day on the Merrick Parkway, and the awful roads, dust and noise added. At last we turned left along a denuded line of telegraph poles. After five miles or so we pulled off into a shallow bowl of sand flats with greenish shrubs which seemed peaceful and silent away from the swirling road. As we got out of our vehicles and started fires for supper, a soldier on the outskirts reported three demolished tanks just over the rise in the land. So, our mouths crammed with corned beef and dry biscuit, tea in our mugs, we set out to see for ourselves. I only got as far as the first tank. It was a huge German tank, ten wheels and big tractors in back, a veritable Behemoth of machinery, all blistered and burned, in the dusk. Around it was strewn a strange variety of tools, suitcases, food and medicines, mostly

scorched and all in the wild scattering of doom. The ground was literally spiky with bits of shrapnel and in the background a tremendous bomb-crater told the story. One of the men, named Gilcrist, had gotten out of one of the other tanks, they were both English. There were only three graves. The crews of these two tanks which had been hit by our shell while advancing, were in cinders inside the tanks. I picked up a beautiful book from the ruins, on Oriental horses (Berlin 1941) full of Persian and Japanese color-plates. In a half hour or so I was called back to the main center of our bivouac. A German auto had been captured ahead with four youths in it, one with a fractured leg, so they had been told to drive back to us.

It was dark, the traffic was still grinding through and the flames and shells were beginning their evening spurt. The English were sending up multi-colored lights and rockets of red, blue, green and purple into the splendid dusk. They put a splint on the German, gave him some tea and a shot of morphine, and we set out. I didn't have the faintest notion of where I was going, the entire territory being quite new to me. By some miraculous guidance or my rather good bump of direction, we lurched back through the dwindling trains of guns to the desired spot, a tent in the dark. The fellow must have been under twenty, in considerable pain and very scared. I gave him some of my cigarettes and we managed to understand each other, in spite of no common language. He asked if we were going to Cairo or Alexandria, and I fingered out to him we were going only eight miles. He nodded and I smiled at him. Finally the dope worked and beyond groans, we crawled back in silence. Towards the end of the trip we both took a swig of Scotch and arrived tired, but at least in one piece. You will be glad to know that the orderlies seem most solicitous with the prisoners. When I left him he was gently being fed crackers and tea.

I raced home through a veritable fireworks display and

reached camp about nine. I'd had no lunch and supper had consisted of that mouthful before going out to see those tanks. Breakfast next morning was a five minute affair of biscuit and marmalade.

We were off before eight turning away into the wide open desert which rolled ahead of us. Our colonel, a fussy old soul with a red, sandy-haired face, was up ahead following the sun-compass readings. Presently we veered away from any other lines and headed out into the fresh, flat land, full of morning air and sunshine. It turned out to be quite the wrong route, but the release from the crowded track was worth it.

The sky gradually clouded over and the land developed gentle slopes, like an English moor. Patches of vivid green shrubbery appeared, and birds flew overhead. Presently the rain pattered on the ground and our dusty wind-shields were streaming with mud. We drove up over rises of glistening stone, then down through gullies of water and herbage. The grey clouds, so unknown here, piled up and though there was no thunder, the water pouring down on the twisting caravan was very dramatic. We stopped for five minutes and as I passed my rear tire I heard a soft hissing! I examined it and found a sharp stone through the heavy rubber. Four of the fellows helped me and we unbolted and jacked up the car like mad, and managed to get a fresh wheel on just as the order was given to pull out.

I wish I could give you an actual picture of the country-side. It was storming, as I have said, a strong scent of sage blew over the wet slope on the wind. It was chilly and the skeletons of tanks, autos, motorcycles and planes dotting the landscape seemed bizarre and unreal. Here a silent gun tilted against the uncomplaining sky, there a broken wing marked a plane crash. High foreign-looking autos with six doors and station-wagon benches were abandoned in some wayward gully. You could see

a tin of "pasta tomata" lying near a drenched book in the sage-patch. The strange mixture of highly mechanized break-down and the simplicity of the plains was unforgettable, and the lonely quietness over everything.

We drove on, the landscape rising slowly toward the coastline and I realized we were bending back slowly to the Mediterranean. About three in the afternoon we pulled up on a round, rocky hill for lunch, (and a repair job for me!) and spread out in the distance we saw all the medical trains, lorries of ammunition and files of guns that we had by-passed that morning. In an hour or so we moved on again, down into the other encampments, which were already on the move. We came through two tremendous barbed-wire areas, filled with Germans and Italians, all gesticulating and full of good spirits, it seemed. Many were frankly relieved to be out of it, though here and there a Nordic face stoically glowered for the lost cause. The Nazi men certainly believe fully in their "esprit", that is clear. They may be duped, but they are *definite*.

We jounced over the railroad track, the same little line that we'd been parked against in British territory, and found a little stucco station, several loaded freight cars and much activity. Men were re-wiring the telephone poles, repair crews were working over the captured vehicles many of which had been captured *from us* on the push through Alamein. Consequently, as I was later to see, we often came upon our own buildings, roads, supplies, etc., left there when we retreated before. All very confusing and unwarlike!

In about a mile or so we hit the black, smooth Coast Road and I was surprised to see us heading across it, straight for a large hospital camp on the indigo Mediterranean. The white tents shone in the afternoon sun, the Red Crosses flapped in the breeze and the area was laid out in driveways and sign posts. There were many trucks

parked around but none moved. It was some time before I suddenly realized we were in a captured dressing station at Barce, from which the personnel had lately fled! The tents were lined with blue, or sea-green canvas, matting on the floors, chairs, tables, truck-loads of uniforms, cases of Italian mineral water which we fell upon, cases of food and cigarettes! It was like a dream after our long, hungry, dry, drive forward. Our water ration had been two quarts per day per man for cooking, washing and drinking.

We moved on two days later but for forty-eight hours I ate, dozed and BATHED to my heart's content. The station had been a permanent one from the general appearance and even had had nurses working there. It was laid out on a sandy crest, forty feet above the crashing sea, with magnificent wet, black rocks spilling into the water. No beach at this point but a very free, vivid feeling of the Mare Nostrum. The first night, lying in my ambulance, full of delicacies and wine, I heard shouts outside and opened the door to look out. There was an airport squarely behind us on the sands and the German planes, flying over from Crete now, came in from the sea directly overhead. The great searchlights played about through the smoke and glare, just like a Warner Bros. epic.

Next morning we had to ourselves. The Colonel had commandeered most of the enemy goods, and we had a chance to get cleaned up, there being no runs on account of the rushing ahead of all the medical units. I decided to go down the cliff and bathe. There was a steep little path curling down the boulders and, at the bottom a big prow of rock jutting out into the blue, blue water, backed by a shelf of white sand a foot under water. It was a perfect place to clean up and I splashed around in the sunlight with one of your Cash-marked washcloths.

On my way up the rocks again I passed a curious little

cave, with stretchers, blankets and empty tins about. I pictured some romantic Italian making time with a Fraulein-nurse of an Egyptian evening, and went on up to the crest. As I climbed the sea-wall, a group of eight Germans filed past with two guards. Having on nothing but the washcloth they considered capturing me, but I soon convinced them of my good intentions. The guard then told me the Germans had been living in the cave, hoping to make their way up the coast by night. They had been hiding in the cave watching me below! And had been surprised by the Tommies as they patrolled the cliff.

The next morning we set out for another leap up the coast this time mercifully traveling on the macadam road. For hundreds of miles the Coast Road unfolds along the Mediterranean, beaded with lovely towns from Alexandria to Algiers. I tried to think of their names. El Daba, Mersa Matruh, Benghasi, Tripoli, Sfax, with its prudent little French harbor, then on to Tunis. We had forty miles to go so set out at 9 A. M. By dark we had covered twenty-two miles which will give you some idea of the traffic! After a ten-minute stop for cold baked beans we set out driving tail-to-tail in the dark. We had covered two miles when I gracefully ran over a piece of shell ripping my front tire. I pulled off the road and settled down for the night, fixing the tire at dawn the next morning and moving on to where we were supposed to go. I arrived only an hour after the others, who had finally quit in the dark with the hideous traffic and had camped down the road. Fortunately I had an Englishman with me at the time so we had a pleasant ride, using a side road and going through the lovely seaside town of Mersa Matruh, shot to pieces, but still charming in the sunshine. Mersa Matruh—wasn't that where Wallie and the Duke stayed? Equerries and ices on the terrace, the white Schiaperelli dresses, people laughing and drinking and staring at Wallie; like an Egyptian Grande Hotel. How far away it

all seemed now, and strange that the careless sunwashed resort spells only war to the people back home now. The pink hotel at Mersa is only a shell, the whole coast wears a ravaged air, rubble where the villages had been, the Road battered and sunk. Wraiths of wrecked vehicles on either side, the people gone long since. Flashes of familiar things at home kept rising in my mind, running around in my exhausted head. If I could be home again just for an hour, away from the heat and strain and disgust, some place where I wouldn't see an ambulance or a tank or the little white crosses in the sand. You get so damn hungry for a little peace out here. To be able to look up and not see signs of war.

I could write you ten times more fully and still have ideas left, but there is not the time or space. The American Field Service HQ. is due to pass up the road today to Sidi Barrani so we will doubtless be on the move tomorrow.

We've just heard about Algiers! How wonderful. That campaign seems almost bloodless so far.

12

LIFE SEEKS rather peaceful the last few days. No clouds of enemies overhead, the noise is abated, the debris is rapidly being cleared up and the English are taking over, once again, the facilities and towns they raced out of last June! In fact, I often remark on some passing scene only to be told our own unit lived there a few months ago. It is all very see-saw, the captured material is many times our own stuff, while one finds Italian camps equipped with Allied goods, German quartermaster trucks filled with Greek equipment. The droves of prisoners do not seem very harassed and many are laughing and gay. The advance of scientific war-machinery has lessened the individual ferocity, I believe. Then too, many men are completely unwarlike; little civilians called up by an all-powerful government.

The Mediterranean appears here and there along the Road, where we carry casualties to the C.C.S. down about twenty miles. On the way home if there is no rush, we stop by the roadside and go in for a swim. How *unbelievably* blue the water is. And the banks of green sage, the very soft, white sand and the men laughing and splashing in the surf—it is very picturesque.

We are living on corned beef and “dog” biscuit, and water is scarce. The Germans poured fish-oil down the wells before retreating.

This letter is being written at night, believe it or not, I guess this does not mean much to you but we have total darkness by 6 P. M. and I am usually asleep by 7 as there

is absolutely nothing to do and I am conversationally decrepit with my six companions by this time. But this evening, it is almost the devilish hour of eight, I blanketed my windows, closed the rear door and decided to clean out my belongings and write you. The lights are blazing inside and I feel very gala. I am having my last pinch of Nescafé tomorrow at dawn, as I have an early run to make with an emergency case. They do not like us to drive in the blackout if possible.

I think of you all so often, and almost unconsciously. Henry James said "One's friends and kin were an investment in happiness." And no one has surely had better dividends than I. Your letters from home are a tangible expression of all the warmth and affection that wings its way far cross the world. We are all looking forward with bright hearts to the days when there will be no more separations.

13

Received December 12th, 1942.

IT IS ONE OF THOSE DAYS that, even I must admit, sometimes blurs the Egyptian climatic reputation. A fast dust is blowing continuously, not sand, but the light surface powder that flies along in the autumn wind. It seeps into my ambulance between the window cracks and the windshield drifts a bit at the corners with dry dust, like tan snow.

The chief disappointment in a long-range correspondence, to me, is the fact that a letter written in one mood is read so much later by the recipient that the mood had doubtless evaporated by then. Your last letter for instance sounds a bit futile (about the war) and how natural that is! To be truthful, a thinking person, and a feeling one is hard put to find any rhyme or reason to the outcome of human actions. In my own head I can trace back cause and effect, then try to reconcile that with the sights before my eyes—but, sometimes the two don't excuse each other at all. So instead of talking war with you as I should in response, I'll skip over it as a conversation that is already stale.

I just looked up and noticed the whole world was misty with dust, like a monotone study of illusion, all in beige. We had a torrential down-pour a few days ago, I was out walking toward the sea and got drenched. The mud soon was ankle deep and when I returned I found my car in the midst of a raging stream. Next day all was calm and thousands of little green plants, grasses, Jack-in-the-

Pulpits and melon vines were vigorously crawling all over the deposited muck-beds.

I am glad to note in your letters that you're becoming fatalistic; it is much the happiest way to be. I practice what I preach in this respect and find myself able to surmount many things that seem to bother the others a great deal. I daresay in some personal catastrophe, my fatalism would be shaken but I'd be no more unhappy, certainly, because of it. I believe one of the strongest realizations that has come to me out here is the basic simplicity of life, as it may be lived. My sense of values has opened up a whole new bottom-drawer where canned meat tastes delicious, a year-old magazine is fascinating, a fresh bath is an occasion. Of course, should better things present themselves on either side, I'd resent not having them; but with everyone cut down to the same essentials, life is very tasteful, though not highly seasoned! I am not unaware of many things but I often followed the trivial trail in civilized surroundings. These months, besides providing an enormous experience of thrills, excitements, laughter and tears, has also been like an empty room wherein I can sit and listen to the noises in the rest of the crowded house. I have found it possible to get a good perspective on myself and to plan ahead. How long I'll be here is uncertain; it depends on many conditions.

Notations

A pear orchard in the Wadi. Moonlight, chilly driving, midnight halt at Sidi Barrani.

Road menders. Solum after breakfast, Semicircle bay. Climb over the Pass into Libya, Italian barracks on the crest. African blacks working on the road. Viva Mussolini! Commemorative tablets, Fort Cappuzzo. Tobruk in the distance, hospital planes floating down. Graves with guns and traps. Camel on a mine, dead dog. Trucks with

parachutes, Italian flags. Rounding hill Tobruk in the moonlight. Mass of ships sticking out of the water. Double convoy jam, down past the sleeping town.

I'm glad I waited to add this postscript for we have moved a great deal, though no new action as yet. The day after the flood I went into Libya, first to Tobruk then to Benghazi where I am now. After tomorrow's trip of about fifty miles I understand we'll stop and do a spell of work. So far, the travel has been so hectic (when it finally gets under way) that we move on day by day without opening for business.

After a day of violent machine work and much needed grease and oiling we set out at 7 A.M. By noon, we'd left the water and the landscape began to look more greenish. Little by little, grassing hillocks dotted the sand, the slopes grew gentler and the road smoother. Rounding a crest of a hill, I saw a herd of black kids and goats munching in the easy valley below. How peaceful they looked! In an hour the highway led into scenes of rolling country, hillsides with knotted olive trees, a strong wind and scent of herbs blowing past. My heart beat quicker—it seemed almost like the farmland en route to Elmira. Presently one saw patches of rich, fertile earth being plowed with a stocky horse or a silly, haughty camel dragging a rough implement. White plaster farm-houses and barns began to show in the afternoon sun, down the side valleys. The grass was a vibrant, vivid green, short and cheery. Little clumps of bluish shrubs, banks of thyme, rose colored ledges of rock, and whole valleys of yellow Quaker-ladies; such freshness and serenity.

The road was splendid, paved and swooping into the interior like a rough Merrick Parkway! About five o'clock we saw a closed notch ahead, steep hills topped with ancient stone firing towers, eucalyptus trees, barnyards, an old Arabic cemetery. We arrived at a little crossroads, leading to three lyrical and old places; and pulled off

into the wet grass, at the notch. Soon the peasants were bartering eggs and chickens (oh, the wonder of seeing such things again!) There is fresh water, it is quite cold outside. We had supper standing in the wind and as darkness set, Newell Jenkins and I climbed to an old monastery on the abrupt hill. For miles around the valley and fields spread lovingly in the distance. Newell said it looked like Tuscany with so much stone showing and so many undreamed of shades of green, celodon, sage and dun. To me it looked like an old Alpine settlement above the timberline.

I brought back a squawking black chicken for twenty cents, and five eggs. Tonight, with our lights blacked out, the heater on and cigarettes smoking we cooked a mess of fresh, scrambled eggs and made some ersatz coffee on a captured Gerry stove; it was ambrosia! Later I had a sponge bath, brushed my dusty hair, and read my mail. How it was waiting in this legendary Pass is beyond me!

The mornings are chilly now, the nights cold, days comfortable. We are all screaming for the winter regulation uniforms which have been issued to everyone else weeks ago.

I am going to boil the chicken tomorrow when we camp. I don't have a map and honestly am not sure where I am. But I love the country. It's known as a green belt and was the first Italian colonization out here. It is odd to hear Arab nomads chatting in soft Italian, also to go from piastres to liras!

BARCE

AS I SIT HERE writing, like the old lady you mentioned, I can hardly believe it is me! I am at a black painted desk, by a high window looking out over broad and fertile valleys. In the distance the little white "Colonnisazione" houses shine against the rich red earth, the avenues of green trees pivot toward the town a mile away, and the mountains gently glower over in the distance. We've been here a week now and I hope for another one with any luck. This country is considered the most rewarding in Libya and, as such, money was poured into it by Mussolini. The town yonder is a little gem of planning—long arcades of empty shops, the Catholic church on a square, a largish railroad station at one end of a shady "Via", the citadel at the other. Everywhere, a thousand times repeated, in frescoes, decorations, plaster, carvings and ironwork is the Fascist "Credere, obbedire, combattere."

We are surrounded with young orchards and vineyards. The air is wet and fresh and dogs bark as the cows wander home at sunset. For ourselves, we are stationed in an enormous hospital camp which was built for the Colonies several years ago. Consequently, the outlay is a permanent one and, even to an American used to governmental spending, it is very impressive. It covers acres, is cut up by long allees and gardens, troughs of water and gateways. At one end, near the sprawling stables, is a charming group of houses, each different but integrated as to

plan. They were intended for the head doctors, superintendents, etc., about a dozen in a square plan.

I wish I could do justice to the scene we present! To begin with you must remember that for two solid months we have been sleeping on wet sand banks, in stony fields, in the strong wind, in vehicles reeking with petrol fumes and drugs, in every conceivable and miserable condition. The desert-scene which holds so much beauty is devoid of charm in chilly weather or in the rainy season. So as we travelled west, the deepening green and the land's dips and slopes filled me with joy. Somehow life seemed triumphant once more and only then did I realize how used I had become to death and destruction.

Our first night here was lovely out in a large field, the town in the distance. The following day we had to make a forty-eight hour trip with many patients evacuated ahead, back to the coast. It was very gruelling as they often complain and groan, the convoys crawl along, meals are unmentionable and my eyes get so tired. We were up at four in the morning and continued the last lap homeward, after a rainy, muddy trip, by bright moonlight.

Back to camp we found that several of the units had moved into these quarters, so with a rush we set about finding rooms for ourselves. Having a sty in my eye, a spare driver is out with my car now, so I have had two days of quiet here. By some quirk of chance, I am living in a house with various assorted fellows of other units which is a relief in itself! We are in one of the main houses surrounded by unkempt gardens, one story high with ceiling at least fifteen feet high. I have a corner room, twenty feet square with a Harlequin floor in red, white and black tiles. The walls are washed in pink plaster, the deeply recessed windows and double-doors are flat dark olive green. We have panelled shutters inside, and rolled metal screen outside so evening finds us in a blaze of candle light, safe from the glowering black-out. The rooms

of course were empty and filthy, littered with German camp-fires, Italian squalor and old tin cans. We swept and rushed around in clouds of dust, collecting odd chairs and tables from the dozens of buildings in the "campo." After a morning's work that slipped by like magic, I looked about my room and burst out laughing. It was so amazing and unreal. A desk by the window, my books and cigarettes stacked near a bowl of fragrant sage-greens, a canopied stretcher, festooned with mosquito netting looped back with two coq-feather ornaments of some Bandaliere regiment, gray Etruscan benches along the pink wall, a white hospital cabinet holding my valued collection of canned goods, a Servizio Postale striped sack for dirty linen in one corner and all around the room, fantastic baroque scrolls contributed by visiting friends, scratched on with charcoal bits. The apartment has all the charm and dash of a place that one will live in for only a few days—then back to the fields! The lovely view from each tall window adds to the house-in-the-country feeling.

We have our meals in a little building down the road, out of the storm, and actually sit about at small tables after getting our plates filled in a queue. Next door our expensive canteen holds forth in an old drawing room. I have a fire burning in a big iron cauldron in the center of my marble floor, and the scent of sage and smoke is delicious.

The forsaken dogs of the neighborhood go about in packs at night and make one feel sad. What can you do for them? Food and water are not in such quantities that one can feed them, and soon one moves away. Last evening I came in and found two gigantic cats sitting on my window sill devouring an opened can of corned beef. Their eyes in the light of my flash frightened me. They streaked off into the night.

15

If you will look at a map you can trace my route almost exactly, except for occasional detours or trips off the main western road. The towns are usually twenty or thirty miles apart and once off the lovely high plateau of farm-lands, one approaches the sea again. Consequently, on leaving the beautiful hospital at Barce of which I have written you, we drove dead west, going down hill most of the way. The last pass out of the mountains is superb. There is an ancient Turkish fort, Alto di Barce, capping the crest, a mouldering stone square with circular towers at each corner, great gateways with sentry pillars and guard houses. As you pass it on the road it glowers down on the surrounding mountains, impregnable and stony in the green-swept sunshine. Then the road begins a breath-taking series of curves and wind-backs, doubling upon itself until it finally spills out along the flat sea-shore. The scenery here was very much like Egypt, though a bit lusher and with a softer fringe of palms and shrubs to break the austerity. We skirted Bengazi and continued down the road almost to its lowest point. The town with the name like a magician's incantation (Agedabia) is almost levelled and was disappointing as we'd hoped it might boast a market-place. The peasants in this neighborhood also refuse money but want only tea or sugar for trading eggs. Since we are fed by the cook-truck of the unit we are at present attached to, we never see these two commodities except in unbelievable, awful brews! Everybody tries to hoard a few cans

of this or that, like so much gold. I have some Italian tins, a packet of German knock-brat and a bottle of seltzer water. Also some tired lemons which ease the longing for something fresh.

It is about two in the afternoon, they tell me it is Sunday, though nothing indicates it in any way. The sun is warm and pleasant. We are once again under the Colonel who is so fascinated by "dispersal," so as a result, one's nearest neighbor is pleasantly distant. Some of the medical tents are almost out of sight over the scrubby waste. The Colonel was a London radiologist, looks like grandfather, and is about as military. Needless to say he does not bother much with the common herd. I went on a run last evening, spent the night up the road sixty miles and drove back this morning, bringing mail for everyone. Where it came from I don't know, but someone gave me a bundle saying: "Here, this is for your chaps!" so I took it. What a life.

On the way back I had a chance to look around me and the best description is that it looks like the Kingston Flats countryside stretched out for a hundred miles. Minus any hills, of course, and with sandier soil. There are telegraph poles along the whole way, some missing like teeth in a giant comb. The poles must be imported for in the seven hundred or more miles that we have advanced I can't remember seeing a tree more than twenty feet tall. They are often gnarled and spreading but height is not their charm. The rough grey limbs against white walls is very attractive, perhaps mostly as a reaction from the flat soil. The long road is littered with derelict vehicles and the macadam road is pock-marked from shrapnel the entire length. The huge tanks and autos of the fleeing army are already getting rusty and adventurous weeds are creeping closer every day. The British are re-wiring the poles quickly, traffic rolls on and everyone is getting ready for the next push. When you hear a man

say he is "busy" out here, you can be sure he's doing the labors of a twelve year old, and that at his own tempo! The main enemy is monotony and all its attendant pettiness and hair-splitting. I am fortunate in always having been able to interest myself; so that I am not pulling my hair out if Johnny Smith is sent on an errand and I am not. In fact this life suits me in a variety of ways, and I can make the most of the period, I am sure. Not being interested in the organization as such I don't feel the least competitive, so I can work on my own and do my duties in a minimum of excitement. Also, I feel very lucky in knowing several men in the company. Newell Jenkins, of whom I've written you already, is in my unit and his congeniality and wonderful background fill up many a *very* pleasant hour for me. Above all, he is a close enough friend that one can stay silent with as well as talk. Having someone like him to have with you for grey days is a good thing out here, especially when you are hungry and tired, and nobody cares very much. He's off on a run now, but I expect him back this afternoon and will show him my new photos which will interest him a great deal. He is eager to see Woodstock since it seems to combine country life and art to some degree. At the moment, I have aided and abetted his enthusiasm for a small farm, and we wrangle for hours over where to place this room or that, and which part of Vermont is the best. It would be enormous fun to do a house for him when the war is over!

Good heavens, here I am on a fifth page and I said there was no news. If Doctor Johnson was right when he said "the art of letter writing is to write when there's no news, no time, and no incentive," then I must be born for belle-lettres!



Since writing the above our seventy-five vehicles have been sent in many directions and this afternoon Newell and I, and three others are to go to a new position, so I'll hand this letter in now to make sure it is mailed.

16

"This, to me, is one of the most deeply felt and profoundly moving communications that the war has yet inspired. It is one of the war's major tragedies that young men capable of such vision, self-abnegation, and compassion could not be spared to help shape the peace that, God willing, will be as nearly permanent as men of good will can make it."—Deems Taylor.

Dear Mr. Taylor:

A few weeks ago I set out, with a few other American volunteers to advance into Egypt with the Eighth Army. We were driving ambulances donated by our fellow-countrymen and departed in good spirits, eager to be of any service as would aid our Allied wounded. The days passed, the barrage grew to mounting intensity and, as we progressed, we made many a trip to carry not only our own wounded troops but the hurt and dying of Italy and Germany to the near-hospitals. I grew used to loading men from Munich and Rome into my ambulance along with casualties from London or Capetown or Melbourne. We lit cigarettes for all of them, padded pillows against the jolting cars and rendered what little comfort as was possible under these war-clouds.

Early in November I started out to carry a young German fellow, an emergency case, back to the Medical Station across the desert. It was an English holiday, Guy Fawks' Eve, I believe, and the tracer bullets and flares sprayed into a splendid sunset. The trip was horrible, no

headlights in the darkening night, terrible ruts in the track and the continual roar of tanks and convoys moving up around us.

My passenger groaned slightly now and then but an earlier hypodermic had eased his agony somewhat, I hope. As I drove along I thought that medicine, like music, knows no limitations.

And I remembered the Philharmonic concerts of happier days when the magic of music had enriched so many Sunday afternoons at home. I was grateful for those hours, and doubly appreciative, now that I was face to face with war, for the point of view that gave us *great music* rather than only compositions by men of our own political concepts. Music should always be above the exigencies of the moment.

At last the trip was over, two hours to cover ten miles. I pulled up to the operating tent and opened the back doors. From the dusty, torn knap-sack of the soldier a book had fallen to the floor. In the shielded ray of my flashlight I could read the title in that curious German script—"An Introduction to Mozart."

As I stood aside, the orderlies pulled the stretcher out and carried it into the tent: but it was too late—the reader of Mozart had gone on.

I took the book back to the front with me that night, for written in the fly-leaf by my unknown passenger were two words, that, like music and medicine were above enmity. They were Goethe's last words: "Mehr Licht," more light!

And I am writing you of this incident not as a sentimental episode, but to send to the Philharmonic the gratitude and the hungry welcome that will always greet great music wherever, and whenever, civilized men are listening.

Yours most sincerely,
Caleb Milne

EL A G H E I L A

EVER SINCE this morning's dawn I have been picturing you chugging to Elmira purring at an even tempo to extract the last jet of fumes from your petrol supply; and contrasting my day here, with the one you are spending en route.

We are well back in the desert, miles below the sea. At five this morning an English soldier opened my door and told me we were to pick up and be off in an hour. I stepped outside into a thick, wet fog, a rarity in these parts. The mist rolled around in cool, refreshing waves, giving our small caravan a closed-in feeling, which was pleasant in this endless stretch of sand. The country was lovely when the sun broke through later; long rolls of undulating plateaus, patches of dwarfed trees like those Japanese ones in Willow-ware bowls, with great pools of purplish shadows that seemed to reach like water into the vistas, longer and longer as the day closed. At dusk we stopped for the night in a Venetian blaze of colored sky, the west a sheet of changing gold-apricot, the east banked high with great black clouds admitting an occasional early star. I went to sleep before eight after cigarettes, talk, and cocoa in the nearest ambulance with two others. By that time the place was absolutely quiet, the sky was an intense dark blue and all the African stars were shining. As I dozed off, I figured you must be going through Endicott-Johnson City and soon would be seeing those magnificent rich farmlands and valley towards Elmira. How excited you must be!

December 18th

We continued on our trek through the desert, travelling southwards quite deeply, then gradually shifting over to the west, then north. The mileage was only a hundred and twenty or so which will enable you to realize the conditions which necessitated such crawling. It was, for the most part, like travelling up Featherbed Lane in second gear, then we'd slide down the other side, at an acute angle, to wallow in stretches of deep sand. Now and then broad, flats of stone ledge eased our jogged bodies, but not for long. How the big lorries, the watertanks, the crates of surgical ware survived is beyond me. The thermometer in my kit broke to slivers, the enamel on my plate cracked off. It was hectic.

And how staggering to see the endless columns that joined and rejoined the great Westward flow of supplies. We travelled in six, eight and ten serpentine lines, three miles wide and stretching before and aft as far as one could see. If a unit in the front stopped for a quick "lunch" the tail of the train would pass their camp-fires two hours later.

Next morning the furies of war burst out like an abscess. In the early hours they headed our way. We were breakfasting in the strange light of semi-day when we were ordered to move our vehicles and the tent a mile back. Shells were landing in plain sight and it was deemed best to push the Medical Units back a bit. So we pulled back and parked. The Germans blasted a way through behind and before us, how many I cannot say, but as soon as the break-through was made our ambulances were loaded with wounded of the night's business and we set out, supposedly for a twenty mile run back to a Casualty Clearing Station. Dear God, what a trip! At eight that evening we were still going, swerving through mine-fields, past escarpments, a lonely fort of the Senussi tribe, and

old wrecks scattered throughout the desert. Finally, the train of fifteen vehicles stopped, a tent was hastily put up for a hospital, and the necessary cases were patched up, morphined for the third time, and put to bed. I had been awake most of the previous night with a pain so I was all in by the time I'd carried my four men into the tent, eaten in the dark, and unrolled my crumpled blankets. We were short on stretchers since we were accompanied by three lorries of "walking-wounded" who had to be bedded for the night.

One of my passengers was a young South African pilot who was amazingly familiar with all the area we passed through. He told me that from the air, the network of mines beneath the surface of the earth was dimly visible by some curious shadowing from above. The country is prickly with these mines so we have to be very careful driving, and only on paths designated as having been demined. The retreating Italians are great hands at leaving booby-traps along their tracks, from fountain pens that explode to thermos bottles of T.N.T.

Early the following morning we set off once more, heading toward the sea, straight north. Within two hours we had hit the paved section of the main highway and by noon pulled in to the Main Dressing Station. Here a fresh convoy of English ambulances relieved us of our patients and we relaxed for the first time in several wild days.

As is usual, by some freak of coincidents, we saw many friends during the afternoon, fellows who'd separated from us months ago. It is always a pleasant shock to pull up at some barren, bare flat and, in an hour be able to hail a dozen men you know, with their attendant news and questions.

One of our fellows left our first camp-site five minutes after the other cars had pulled out. Evidently this short

space of time made him run into the German advance-troops for he is missing four days now. He'll be quite safe with them but it is bad luck from any angle.

Colonel Richmond and Major Benson flew home the other day to find out what is to become of us in the future. The big American planes fly past so often now they seem like a bus-route. It is a thrill to see the star on the end of the body and realize the pilot comes from familiar territory.

The Marble Arch turned out to be a gigantic modern triumphal, with a pagoda top, a center inset of a huge bronze figure looking down the road, two Eiffel Tower bases and much Mussolini bravura written all over it.

18

DU SK AND DAWN are hours of danger as well as beauty. In the last great flush of color the bombing planes come droning across the sky. I have seen them come through the golden shaft of light each evening. Sometimes the marauders arrive in droves like mechanized bees, at other times a single plane circles overhead in the west, a deadly precursor to the black wings of night. After the long African afternoon the ground is warm and hospitable. The lowering of the sun closes in the vastness of the desert somewhat and men eat their suppers in the quiet golden wine of late afternoon. Here and there a lorry groans along a battered white road or a soldier sings over his work. But the shells are silent and the dusty queues of traffic have long since passed along the road. Cigarettes smell good in the clear air, the spilled petrol of the day has evaporated in the sand, leaving only an astringent echo to the nostrils.

Merriment, like wit, loses its vigor in the distance and becomes musical, having no meaning nor malice it floats over the ground devoid of any human quality, blending in with the soft air and the stained-glass sky.

One evening I was lying on the sand cushioned by my camouflage net, the fading light having grown too dim for reading. Across the west, great copper banners were streaming from the horizon. The sun had set but its power was still triumphant pouring forth its golden radiance from beneath the rim of the earth, challenging the tender moon and the stars. Already Venus shone in the sky

while in the East the first flickerings of the Pleiades and the pale emergence of Orion announced the evening. The air was very still and clear. Each long-gun, the dusty lorries, every work-a-day motor and distant tank laying in the pool of retrenchant light, assumed a touching and legendary quality spread across the vast landscape like some old caravan caught immobile against the sunset. I lay back my eyes tired from the sun. An old hymn Annie (old nurse) used to sing to me crept through my head "Now the day is over." How sweet the melody is and the words simple and patient. I remembered her elderly negro face droning out the verses in her soft Southern accent. My body slipped back onto the cushion and where it least seemed possible I found peace. A peace that was unknown to me in cities, and only occasionally in our New York countryside. There is a repose in flat land. No mountains lead the mind away and no roads wind out to other worlds. You are alone in the stretches of the eye, no matter how full the scene. I drifted off into my own kingdom slipping into a deepening stream of forgetfulness. I crossed over the channel of sleep lying vulnerable and naked on the sand.

A rush of chill air swept over me, I woke up violently as a bomb crashed. The ground shook, my ears winced at the sudden pressure impact, a haze of invisible sand filled the air. The sky was filled with the drone of motors. To one side the steady thudding on the earth and the terrific side-swipe of noise indicated a targetted objective. The flashes lit the night spasmodically while the whine of guns and delicate tracery of fire-bullets criss-crossed the sky. In a few seconds the ear-splitting shower of anti-aircraft barrage multiplied into a terrific din overhead. As I looked about I felt a chill of horror slide over my flesh. In the splinters of illumination no one was visible. Evidently I was the only person who had not reached a trench. Alone I lay there exposed to the bullets on all

sides. With a stupid primeval impulse I tried to pull the net over my head. For some reason I was furious with myself for having fallen asleep. Only a fool would have been seduced by a sunset. This net was too clumsy to move so I shoved it back, and stretched out, hugging the sand savagely. The Olympian crash of noise was ear-splitting. Now they were trying to spot the enemy overhead with shells. There was the patter of ack-ack bullets falling around the hill. My brain was numb. I was unable to move or think and lay there frozen in the vacuum of noise. Somehow I was more afraid of our own barrage falling on me than of the enemy's bombs. The German punishment was too vast, it spelled oblivion, it was the hissing bullets that endangered me the most. I clutched at the ground, my heart racing with fright; it seemed that the earth was rising up offering me to the elements, ever higher. The drone of the planes was directly overhead now. They had spent their bombs on the tracks below our hill and were moving to a new position. The throb of their motors shattered the night air. It was almost impossible to lie still beneath them—indeed I might have raced in crazy circles but some inner compulsion kept insisting to stay still, stay still! Maybe they will go away! And as I lay there engulfed in dread and horror I heard the squadron wheel off slightly to the right. If they did not circle that meant they were moving on. I held my breath, then as the minutes hung trembling in fear, the drone grew fainter. I raised my head from the ground and forced my eyes open. Against the starry sky a few bars of black climbed higher and higher, the area-guns spitting bullets and tracers after them. They were veering off to the coast!

I pulled myself up on one elbow, my body runneled with sweat. For a second I could not believe I was alive. My heart was still pounding while reactive waves of nausea choked in my throat. I heard a curious whirring noise

overhead. I thought my end had come. Heading directly for me and silently advancing in a great sweep of cold air, a dark glider of black skimmed towards me, only a few feet off the ground. I stared at it, frozen, as the slow whirl bore down with relentless speed. It was almost on top of me. Suddenly in that empty crystal moment when doom confronts one, I heard the soft brush of touching wings and the secret chirrupings of a great flight. Above me, triumphant through the battle wheeled a great crescent of sand-larks, beating the night air, southward to the Transvaal Plain.

Oh, the miraculous spirit, the unquenchable force of life and liberties! Never again can I salute the heralds with so grateful a spirit as reached out to bid God-speed to that whirring rustle of birds. I jumped to my feet, my heart high and all the starred sky was filled with banners.

Christmas 1942

YOUR LETTER of November 29th combined all the qualities that the perfect letter should have; timeliness (I was feeling very low when it arrived yesterday), news and, most of all, the affections that prompted it. How grateful and thanksgiving one can be for such as you, who seem to understand the unsaid, anticipate the unasked for. The very warmest and deepest Christmas wishes to you, and may their sincerity glow in the cold January day they will reach you. As I write the little water-color photo of Spinny (wirehaired fox terrier) looks out from my writing case and, beneath it, two Scotties come hurtling down that blessed snow-banked lane in the mountains. There is a scarlet maple leaf in another pocket, and pictures of everyone but Stormy (new-born nephew) whom I hope to see soon en negligee in a sea-shell or a fur rug. So you see, the powers of imagination coupled with a loving family have folded a whole background between two covers for me.

And yet today how far away, how unbelievably lonely we all feel. I believe in our heads we listen to distant church bells, inhale the wood-smoked icy air and knock at bewreathed doors. It would be easier perhaps if there were no intimations of Christmas at all: but inevitably one hears, or is given greetings, and we had a slice of bread this morning with our breakfast. The Tommies that we are at present travelling with, each received the *opportunity* to purchase a bottle of beer in memory of Christ's

birthday! The planes are quiet for these few hours, and we can see the Star of the East.

Yesterday we had been encamped for three days in a shallow valley, one of those gentle pauses in the everlasting desert that refreshes the eye and the mind and quickens the heart again with the sight of tender greens and the sunshine on cool grass. It fell off to one side from a dusty rock-road that deviates southward from the main Coastal Highway. After ten miles of nerve-shattering bumps and ditches the way wound to the crest of a rise in the hills. There before one's weary gaze lay this oasis-fed mile or two of peace. There was a small village through which traffic went on, a low castle that had housed a radio station of the Italian colonists and a tiny square filled with lamp posts and dry flower beds. From this centralization of village life a grassy lane wanders off down into lush meadows and a quiet clump of trees. A stone well-house, dynamited by its owners, lay like an ancient ruin among the hillocks of wild rockets, the only reminder of warfare in this countryside. The lane skirted harrowed fields in a loose circle, at the foot of the gentle hills which enclosed one, as it were, in a bowl of security and serenity. It is curious what a great difference this quality must make on civilized man. Sleeping in the open one feels that in this pleasant embrace of dappled hill and meadow no harm can come, no jarring note intrude in the buzzing stillness.

There were rich sandy patches where the season-rains had left a coating of loam. Here vigorous Michaelmas daisies, full size but on two-inch stems, raise their fresh white petals in the grass. Then wide swathes of blue, fragrant rocket drifted across the fields, heightened here and there with intensely violetted aquilegia, likewise in miniature. The slopes in the background were warm, green-brown with winding double ruts mounting up over the crests. As evening fell the long shadows deepened across

the valley and the sturdy eucalyptus grove by the well was silhouetted in the dusky softness. We discussed among ourselves as to what special quality made these sunfalls so lovely and different. The consensus of opinion finally rallied to the clear golden aura that touches this world twice in twenty-four hours. The afternoon clouds positively burst with luminous splendor, still soft and radiant; each cloud, be it Titian grandiosity or the next day's mere fluffs of white, becomes charged with a deep density of *goldness*, rimmed with light and holding all the pale tints of the setting sun.

At such moments the nestling settlements of the Arabs or Italian colonists assumes a breath-taking suspension, like a last full beneficence before the darkness. The most mundane traffic crawling along the spine of a hill becomes momentarily a rare and historical caravan of romance in the spendors of the dusk.

And it was at just such a moment that we received orders to move on yesterday. Our ambulances hastily packed and petrolled, we pulled into line to await the Colonel's starting of the convoy; and leaning from the window I took a last full breath of the clove scent to carry me through my holiday. As we drove off the lane, darkness set in and it was Christmas Eve.

We continued our way sixty miles into the desert, travelling in the white light of a full moon. There was no road whatsoever, but the terrain was hard gravel, not too bad for driving, and the dips were infrequent and gradual. We stopped once for some cold tinned beef and dog biscuit, and smoked a cigarette. Since we carry emergency supplies of petrol for our own vehicles, it was unwise to light up while travelling. In a few hours we reached this plateau absolutely flat with a hard stony surface, a cemetery of sepulchred shrubs, prickly and grey in the moonlight under the vast starry ceiling. It was cold after the sun set and we opened a bottle saved for the occasion.

About ten o'clock, a half dozen or so of the Americans walked over to my ambulance. We are a good quarter of a mile apart. We bundled up in all available scarves and sweaters, the night was clear and the air exhilarating. With the alcohol warming one's veins the sense of wonder and belief seemed startlingly real. One man began to sing and presently, perhaps a bit shyly we chorused in. For an hour or so, later joined by two Englishmen, we lustily caroled "O Little Town of Bethlehem", "Good King Wenceslaus" and "Silent Night". Then we sang some German songs, and one French noel, the name of which I have forgotten. Then one of the Britishers asked for "My Country t'is of Thee" since he knew the music of "God Save the King!" To end, I suggested my old favorite, "Now the Day is Over" which sounded beautiful in the stillness; and we parted. Overhead the Bethlehem Star and the full moon flooded the desert with white light.

Today has been absolutely quiet, not even a distant gun or airplane overhead. The sun is strong and I am writing in my shirt sleeves.

The New York office sent us each a wallet (the *one* thing I should have thought every man must have before leaving) and the Cairo HQ. sent out a box containing a package of cigarettes, a bar of chocolate, some loose walnuts and a small slice of fruit cake. But joys of joys, we finally achieved some British overcoats, five for nine of us, but still warm and comforting. A box from Altmans with Spinny's card, arrived yesterday with wonderful, heavenly biscuits, sardines and Virginia Rounds!

I have been enjoying and absorbing the "Wartime Letters" of Rainer Rilke whom I had heretofore relegated to my more neurotic acquaintances. But their clarity and sensitiveness are extraordinarily moving, especially in this atmosphere.

By this evening we expect to be pushing ahead once more as action ahead always needs medical assistance.

How hollow and horrible war is on such a holy day for mankind. I wondered last night, as I walked over to the operating tent for midnight mass, what can the priest say, what will he find to celebrate in a traditional religious metier situated on a battlefield? If I looked for an explanation, some Christian wisdom to light such a confused situation, I was doomed to disappointment. He gave a hackneyed history of Christmas Day, celebrated a monotonous mass in sloppy Latin, and refused communion to all who were not Romans. How miserable the heights of the Church can seem in all but a few hands! The purple surplice, the candles on surgical cases, the red, beaten English soldier-faces looking for some Napoleonic courage de nuit, the smell of ether hanging to the cold canvas—it was all so forlorn and it could, and should, have been so revivifying.

This morning the cars were drenched with heavy dew, but the day is clear. We sat about drinking murky tea and jealously nibbling on our chocolate bar, shouting down anyone who lapsed into a turkey-and-brandy frame of mind.

It is difficult at times to co-ordinate the time element between home and here. But last night it was pleasant and reassuring to know that for a few crossing hours we were all asleep together; and I know our Christmas spirits, though far apart, were able to fuse and join one another in some happy midway of affection and greeting. I know this must be so for today is strong with that inner happiness that is, after all, the *essence* of Christmas.

Now see what a poor exchange you have gotten for all the Duck-at-the-Plaza and the news of home. I apologize for my field is limited, but be assured of a quite limitless cargo of holiday wishes and prayers. I have already adopted your snap-shot message. "Not yet, but soon!"

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Received January 26th, 1943

I HAVE NOT WRITTEN you for a week or more as there seemed absolutely nothing happening; or rather the extreme monotony dried up any pleasure in writing. Newell Jenkins and I spent a crazy week trying to find our new unit, which sprang ahead in leaps and bounds and was thus out of touch with signals. En route his wheel broke, and I had three punctures, each one requiring a good two hours repair job, so the situation was tiring, but pleasant in its escape from petty regulations. On New Year's Eve we had almost overtaken the unit as darkness set in and we pulled up and camped with an armoured detachment along a vast moonlit valley. The news came on at 8 P. M., we had some gin to toast the New Year, and even bathed for the occasion, but it was dreary.

Next day we made connections and have been far up ahead since. The Wadi is absolutely bare filled with rocky channels, shadowy "kills" and an ancient, hazy rust color that is curiously juxtaposition to the cold wind and steady sunlight. Immense rock-ledges and slivered stones cut the tires to shreds. Not a living thing in sight as far as you can see up and down the great main valley which resembles a crater-on-the-moon. If it had not been for the flocks of German planes at dawn and during the afternoon, life would have been insupportable. We had eight ambulances there of our own, and only one a day was used. Consequently for four or five day periods the most horrible dullness set in, (perhaps writing about it will dispel it!) the food was short for a time, and a sand-

storm blew for two whole days. Even I, who am usually able to cheer others up, felt low and deathly tired of it all.

What was my surprise, the other evening to have a car sent up to replace me! I was to chauffeur the head of the _____ censored _____ since I have been begging to be allowed to see an American dentist. I was overjoyed, but alas, through a double delay in my getting the message, I arrived two hours too late at Field HQs. and the _____ had already left with two quite healthy men driving him to the city. Such luck, and I was so near to going. I only hope I can hang on with this toothache until a similar circumstance presents itself.

So here I am back at the Coast Road, the day after, waiting for a new tire, and some motor fixing. These grassy stretches that run along the shore-line are blushed with flowers now, why, at our coldest period, I cannot tell you. They ought to be imported home for God knows they are *hardy!* We walk through them up to our knees, all blue and yellow and lemon-colored. There are both purple and lavender rocket, violet aquilegia, enormous proud gold dandelions, far lovelier than ours at home, ivory freesia and a form of sunny yellow primroses. The enclosed dried flowers will give you some idea.

Just now I peered through the open window and four Arabs approached through the thicket, swathed in white or grey burnoses, shawls wound about them and woolen turbans on their copper-colored heads against the breeze. You'd go mad over the hand woven cloth! They are coming down the gentle slope from the desert beyond, walking in a wash of flowers. They will, I know, have eggs or a chicken, hidden beneath their wrappings, to be traded for chai (tea), or sukhara (sugar). Strange drinks to a nomad's taste, but such is the fame of Sir Thomas Lipton. No, it is not eggs this time; they have a lamb baa-baaing that they would be happy, salaaming many times, to kill (picture the gesture yourself) for many cigarros.

The tastes must change as one approaches Tripoli; perhaps the tea-drinkers are only in the wilder districts? Of course, sitting here with two cook-houses and a canteen, is the one time I don't need a leg of lamb. This is my unlucky week! How often in some glum cave the meat on a spit would have been deliriously appreciated.

I now have, to warm your heart, a heavy overcoat, a wool tunic and wool slacks so the cold does not faze me any more. I feel well taken care of materially so do not worry about me.

So long, and forgive this semi-demi gloomy letter. I'll be alright soon.

21

EL CHEBIR

ABOUT 2:30 we got under way. From the sheltered, rusty wadi, the three strings of vehicles wound out into the vast floor of the valley. Far ahead one could see other caravans twisting up into the hills, others moving in to join the ascent, still others trickling down from distant crevasses onto the huge pebbled floor of El Chebir. The order had been given to keep a distance of 200 yards between vehicles, but as usual, a few stragglers and late departures disrupted the perfection of the plan. Across my bow a water-truck, puffing and coughing, pulled into line. Now and then a lorry from the flank lumbered across desperately trying to make time through the deep sand-wedges. By the time I had crossed the valley my mileage gauge showed an advance of three miles which seemed enormous, looking back at our old camp, deserted now, but for a few petrol tins shining in the sun. But distance is an illusion and the desert is nothing more than distances stretching ahead into infinity.

Ahead of me the sinuous train of biscuit colored vehicles edged around the rising shoulder of some fresh hills. Alongside the track the welcome green lushness of the well-lands graced an acre of sandiness. A few lengths further on I bade goodbye to the tomb of the Holy Man, as I slipped past it on the hill. The four-square roof was golden in the sun, the black iron stirrups hung like temple bells, bannered and cold, along the drooping cornice.

There was a mighty rut across the track near the crest; the white rocks stuck up sharply through the thick car-

pet of dust, and I wondered if my rotten tires would bite into it without bursting. Shifting into the lowest gear I crawled ahead, picking the least tortuous gullies to cross over. Luck was with me and before long I hit the crest of the new flat-top, that barren plateau that is limited by the two wadis, El Chebir and Zem-Zem. Zem-Zem, what a foolish name! Repetitious as the stunted landscape, dull as the deadly uniformity of myriad shrubs, bristling their dry twigs every few feet on the immense beige carpet. Ah, Zem-Zem, Bug Bug, Zuga Zug! How peaceful, how haunted you will be. Where are the infinitesimal grease drips of 10,000 carburetors, the scattered deluge of gasoline tins, the webbed network of tire tracks which, like old parchment, folded a thousand times, softened your bare harshness for few furtive weeks? The sun has dried the sifting sands across each trail, the awful Spring kamseens have drifted away every trace of man's encroachment, the spitting violence of the rains obliterate our every footprint and curve of wheel; once again the stars look down on the limitless sweeps and seen through a glass darkly the distant beyond is broken once or twice by the half-imagined, half-seen string of pack-camels, pin-points on the past.

And ahead, through a haze of dust, went the Army. The guns rumbled on their careening carriages, the lorries lurched and dragged over the tan powder and white rocks. We drove ahead at decent intervals for six miles; then with no warning the convoy took a sharp curved turn and dispersed into the scrubby lands. The heater in my ambulance was roaring cheerfully and the stiff wind without brought no warning hint of planes. Consequently I was taken by surprise when a flight of Stukas, black and evil, in the sunlight, swooped upon us. There was a burst of orange flame from the ventral ducts, a sharp crackling ripple of gun-fire and the flapping canvas cover of the lorry next to me snapped with holes. For some in-

ane reason I jammed my coat-collar up and pulled my head down tight into my shoulders as the dark body swooped at me. It zoomed with a mighty roar over my head and I saw the sand lift and snap in a sprinkle of machine gun bullets. Then it was gone and through my back window I could see the black cross on the plane's tail slip down into the valley behind. There wasn't time to be frightened. It was over as soon as it had begun; so I fished out a Virginia Round and struck a match. Then I got out and looked about the ambulance. It had not been hit luckily, though rock-chips had ricocheted on to the running board. On all sides men stood up once more and brushed the sand from their clothing. Then climbed back into our seats, and the train moved on.

An hour before sunset the Transport Officers' little car came bouncing over the stones tearing up to each vehicle as it slowed down obediently. Orders were to "laager" for the evening hours; at midnight we would move ahead under the dubious cover of a half-moon sky. I pulled off the track and headed for an open spot. If each vehicle parked down 600 feet, as ordered, from its nearest neighbor the caravan would be pushed into the sea. But, at best, it was wise to be as far away as possible. By the time I had finally outstripped the lorries and ambulances who were streaking over the desert parallel with me, I was miles away from the main track, just barely visible in the dim distance was the cook-truck. It was a half hours' walk to it. I laid down for a short rest. My back was tired from the jolting and we were short on food, having been waiting to leave since dawn.

My mind wandered off into dreams and imaginings as I lay there, my legs bathed in the warm rays of the sun. The eve of a battle always found me in a curious state of elation and horror.

22

TRIPOLI

I HAVEN'T WRITTEN you for nigh on three weeks, which is a remarkable fact; but life has been so higgledy-piggledy that letters were impossible. It is also out of the question to give you, in a letter, the whole picture of the past fortnight so I will jump to the present, January 24th, and announce that I am sitting in the 'Ospodale Coloniale in Tripoli, where I am aide to one Colonel Beamish, of the British Army! My first day of this assignment, too. In between my letter from the Wadi el Chebir on January 4th, and now there has been a steady, dizzy stream of sudden advances from Pilastrina through the Wadi Zem-Zem, through the defiles and mines in the pass. The old ruins with daisies on the mouldering stones, break-downs, flights by night, days without much food and, beginning a week ago, the loveliness of the Tripolitanian towns. From the eternal, hard monotony of the Libyan desert, we drifted, or rather drove, into rich grass-lands, mountains coming nearer and nearer. Then the Arabian-Nights' town of Beni-Ulid complete with rose-red cliff houses, palms against the blazing moon-light, Arab horses with red saddles.

Two days later (I was then tagging along with our HQ. caravan, having a broken spring and they never stopping long enough to have time to set up shop). By the end of a few more days—I am still so whirling with impressions and sights I cannot sort them out!—we pulled up about twenty kilometers from Tripoli. Nelson Bridger appeared in a jeep with Field cashier-funds for the vari-

ous units, and we have had enormous fun together flying around this Tuscan-like coast. Since my car was out of commission I was unable to return to my unit for a time.

Finally the AFS HQ. entered Tripoli, late yesterday afternoon. A request had come in from the Director of Medical Service for a car and driver so, my vehicle now being mended, I am in a huge, square hospital, sitting in the Scotch sergeant's room by the main door, at the beck and call of the Colonel. I have *meals, hot showers!!*, and a desk here and, when needed I drive the Old Boy all over Tripoli and the suburbs.

The town is very old, the name of course means three cities. There is a modern quarter of white plaster, plaza, hotels, colonnades of shops, fountains and Monte Carlo houses: the Jewish quarter, crowded with rabbis, dull robes, ear-locks, squatting shopkeepers and brass-makers, and the native quarter, all noise, donkeys, screams, red and raspberry fezzes, smells and bazaars. There were signs on the street reading:

"Penalty for looting is two years!

Behave yourself in town!

Watch out for booby traps.

Remember—two years.

You have been warned."

I have seen so little of the city that I cannot describe more than this general impression now.

Our HQ. is in a great sprawling barracks, still unfinished, a mile or so from the center of town. The buildings are arranged in a vast square with mammoth garages, machine shops, wards, rooms, mess halls and gates. The enclosed area is cut up into tank-pits, shelters, bomb holes and hillocks of targets. The great enclosed corridors are cool and gloomy but we at last are under a roof, which is novel and exciting. The radio is set up in one hall and we hear broadcasts from all over the world.

I often wonder if it is the loneliness of the deserts that makes any town so impressive to me now? Whatever it is, the luxuries, the wrought iron and gardens, the paved roads and walled patios seem to be a veritable Eden in my eyes. Last evening after "tea" at five-thirty, Nelson and I drove in the open jeep a mile or two to pay a visit to Tony Stewart's unit. They were with a New Zealand Medical Group parked in the loveliest possible nursery gardens. While Nelson dispensed Italian lira, Egyptian piastres, and British Military Authority monies to the fellows, I wandered off down long allees of feathery eucalyptus, branching off on paved walks, mossy and dim in the sunset. There were superbly cultivated beds of great red strawberries, rows of broccoli in the distance, green whorls of cabbage, and a heavy sweetness indicated the glossy depth of old orange trees. The green-houses were smothered in red and violet bougainvillea, geraniums were huge and strong-scented. One house, cool and dark, was towering with ferns, maidenhair and hardier kinds, a deep pool gurgling in a wall-basin. Another deserted house, all glass and vines, was devoted to the most fantastic cacti ranged in tiny pots and gradually assuming gargantuan proportions. It was a magnificent collection, even I could see, and seemed to be quite unhurt. The weather is curious for it is really too cold to have roses in bloom and vines flaming with color. I had ice on my windshield a week ago, but the desert was sprinkled with flowers coming into bud.

I wish you could see the jars, the flower-pots, the wine casks and the bottles that are in common usage all along our route. You'd grow dizzy with envy: though, of course, the natives become equally faint over a can opener or an empty petrol tin!

Later in the day.

Have just returned after touring from one HQ. to an-
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other in Tripoli. The Colonel is very nice and pleasant. Had hospital lunch of beans and macaroni, cauliflower and meat, brown rolls and "Dago red."

The populace seems actually relieved to have the Germans out and a more lenient conqueror on the premises. The Italians seem so talkative yet indolent. The Arabs are quite charming here with a fine sense of humor and more polish, naturally, than the desert ones or the occasional farmers.

I have never realized so acutely the excellence of American comfort as I do now. The most luxurious places here are clumsy and uncomfortable from our point of view. The people all seem so little! Vitamins and bathrooms certainly do leave their mark, no matter what one thinks. The flaming colors and the cheap pleasures almost compensate for the backwardness. The wines are delicious and within a few days the authorities will allow the shops to open again.

Your tin box of Nescafé has been a rare treasure, how many times I've blessed you for it on cold nights and wet dawns. Everybody keeps sending me news of rationing which leaves me quite unmoved! But no news of Errol Flynn, the Manpower Act or the home Front?

Next Day:

This morning I drove two Italian dottori and four Arab servants to the half demolished supply stores, set in the midst of a lovely tropical garden. Much Mussolini colonnading in rose colored stucco, flights of steps and soaring ceilings. Whole wings were powdered by the English bombs of the past fortnight. In the cellars, knee-deep in broken glass and spilt serums was a magnificent supply of medical equipment. It seemed the natives looted it during the siege and, not knowing how to read, ripped open everything. The medicines were worth over a million lira but some portion can be salvaged.

One of the doctors gave me a flacon of oil of bergamot. There were long cabinets full of cellophaned herbs and dried mixtures, bandages by the barrel, surgical equipment rusted from the seeping fluids.

The situation here is so strange in its complete naturalness! It seems impossible that four days ago one side killed the other. Now all is serene, business goes on, traffic moves, I learn Italian, they learn English, the wash-girls giggle and crowd in my room to watch me shave, we joke and scream *Viva Mussolini* at each other. What is it all about? I knew it before but I can see it now; *People*, as such, have no hate. It is the official point-of-view that creates trouble. That is a very trite statement but I am completely unable to visualize war: especially this one—so full of traffic and business, and transport problems and conferences. What is the motivation? I suppose it has exhausted itself after four years.

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Received February 1st, 1943.

HOW I WISHED you had been here yesterday! It was Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, and a poor time to wander through the Citta Vecchio, or the old city: but I had two hours off at lunch time and the day was warm and sunny. I disappeared through the huge mediaeval portals of the great wall down by the harbor, into a narrow, ancient honeycomb of lanes, lined with tiny shops, hardly more than a heavy, iron barred door in a plaster wall. One steps over a wooden portal-board onto hard, tramped earth flooring, the one room smelly and somehow evil-looking. In one a young Jew sells vials of oily perfume—I bought “gramma d’ambra” for one shilling, in another an old Arab unrolls thick sheep and red fox skins for your inspection. The service is very oriental and desultory, a complete poker-face being just the job. Being a religious holiday, the majority of the angled streets were locked up, or rather the old, iron bars were securely locked with giant keyholes staring blankly out on the passerby. But one street was wide open, roofed from the sun by colored glass transoms, a long ceiling-trough down the center raised a foot or so, and supporting a never-ending grape vine of mammoth size. In the intense heat of a Tripoli summer, the cool green leaves shifting overhead must be very pleasant. Down this side street, the shops on either side were open and busy. It was the “Street of the Weavers”. Each shop held two or three men, busy at various tasks in the eight-foot square of the interior. The loom filled the *entire* front of the shop, be-

ing carpeted beneath and lit by oil lamps above. To work the big shuttle, the weavers crawled under the loom, stood behind it and hovered in it! Behind it the copper pots and pans for mealtime, a pallet to sleep on, an old chest to keep money in. All seemed to be weaving the "barrancano" or great length of wool cloth that all Arabs wear in cold weather. It is about fifteen feet long and five feet wide, dead white for men and, striped in red for the women. The designs are not especially novel since only stripes are allowed by the Musselman decree, just as the little red pillbox hats of the Moslems may be bound in white linen only if the wearer has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. I bought for due sterling (\$8.50) a red and white length, twelve feet long which I thought you might like to use for a couch-throw or a porch blanket. Both ends were ravelly so I sewed them up very crudely with Army thread!

The Madre Superiore has just been in, dressed in a hundred dark blue petticoats, long black apron, dark cross dangling on a rosary from her waist, a starched white fichu crossed on her virginal bosom, and great dripping wings to her stiff white coif.

After mutual halting expression of how bella the day was, I asked for permission to use the gas-stove down the corridor, and she decided to give me a fresh table-cloth. The trays were brought in at 11:30 and 5. I am free at 1:15 and 7 so naturally the macaroni and food is icy by the time I reach it. But, oh, the flavors! Olive oil and pasta tomato, herbs and garlic! The meat is terrible and I rarely eat it, as the shortage is so intense, one never knows what is being dished up. But I love the big plates of messy, Italian concoctions even when they are cold. For breakfast one tiny cup of black coffee is sent in. I munch on yesterday's bread and eke out my marmalade tin. Cigarettes are worth their weight in gold here now. Can you keep a supply of Virginia Rounds, tipped, on

the way, please? For over a year, practically, no civilian supplies have arrived so prices are sky-high for anything imported. The few Arab merchants who vend dates, bad candy, and hot egg-fritters on the main streets are mobbed and sold out in the twinkling of an eye by the troops. The Jew, Abyssinians, and some Arabs do all the menial work for about twelve dollars a month.

I am glad you are saving letters because it is next to impossible to write more than a series of impressions, short and quick, while out here. The interruptions are so everlasting, the daily life so haphazard, that one can get no fullness or style in any attempt to write.

My two Italian belles, who visit me continually to resweep and chatter, say to tell you that, "Sina e Fortuna Salutanno la madre del' Americano!" Both are Jewish with wonderful black tresses and wild gesticulations, their white hospital frocks not hiding in the least their chief *raison-d'etre*!

P.S. Oh, let's have a *beautiful* unusual garden this summer that requires a lot of work!!

TRIPOLI

HERE IT IS the day before St. Valentine's and a cold wet sirocco is blowing up from the battered harbor. The wrecked vessels of Italy pull at their anchors and the palms whip and crack mechanically in the wind. But at lunch, wandering about in the garden, I found a few fresh violets sprinkled in the ever-present jungle of geraniums. A YMCA truck was wedged between a fish pool and several white columns and the sun penetrated in a most Februarish fashion. All in all, the weather here is about like Florida.

Each day presents some new detail of this really beautiful city. Not being familiar with Italian architecture, it seems most refreshing and exotic to me. And the sophisticated merging of "Fascist Modern" into the balustrades and overhanging balconies, it is most intriguing. I have seen a hundred variations of wrought iron traceries and as many designs of wall and window. The mouldings are very lovely, especially in strong sunlight. Towards eight o'clock, the houses, originally pure white but now washed rose or stale hydrangea-blue melt into the darkness with a most romantic air, and the trailing vines and exuberant shrubs seem to climb over all the buildings in the rising moonlight. From outside many houses are little more than a long flat wall cut by a few barred windows and a heavy door, but inside the court is surrounded on all sides by a square balcony, gnarled vines and usually a dripping fountain. The bare earth is gravelled or laid with brilliant bluish tiles, opening to allow stiff tropical flower

beds. In cold weather the plan is poor but at midday, and for most of the stifling year, these inner gardens are cool and lovely.

Next day:

Am sitting on a hill a few miles out of the city, at the Contagious Diseases Farm. The wind is blowing hard and the sea below is lashed into indigo ribbons. A grey hospital ship, half awash in the choppy harbor, shakes with a hundred hammer blows from within her dead deck. The sprawling building was an old Turkish fort, covering the whole hillside, ancient musket-slits and little brick guard-cupolas at every gate. A moustached old woman in filthy black shawls is tapping on my ambulance window. She wants some "benzina". But petrol is severely rationed and one cannot, in spite of natural impulses, supply the myriad requests for benzina, biscuits and cigarettes.

Life in Triopli goes on at an even keel. Of the five theaters in the city one is opened for the troops. Last evening I sat in the Fascist Building and saw a unique Charlie Chase comedy, circa 1922 A. D. The film ends if there is any kind of an air raid and does not begin again that evening which is inexplicable. Occasionally you are able to see the whole show and then file out into the semi-tropical blackout at eight-thirty and walk home under the stars.

When the enemy troops evacuated, the stores of wine, sugar, wheat, etc., were either sent off or thrown in the Mediterranean and with the Harbor blocked for a whole week by four sunken vessels, scuttled, full of cement, the food situation for the populace is not very cheerful. Camel meat is two dollars a pound, eggs are twenty cents apiece if you can get them, bread is mostly unobtainable, no sweets whatsoever. All in all, I think the British are doing an excellent job of occupation—which covers such unmili-

tary items as street cleaning, brothel inspection and issuing powdered milk to the people. Since I am with Colonel Beamish I have had an extremely interesting time, going about to all sorts of places and talking awful Italian which is a good deal like my Germantown Academy Spanish. On the boat we had elementary Arabic lessons so I can always establish a friendly conversation of words and pantomime with the natives.

It is quite unbelievable to talk with some of the very charming Italian residents such as doctors, lawyers, business men etc. They are so thoroughly soaked in the "facts" that Fascism has baled out to them that they are like visitors from another planet. It is rather pathetic to talk to them, in some cases very irritating. Yesterday I was emphatically told that Rockefeller and Roosevelt were 100% Jewish blood, that America had many concentration camps, and that Russia was beaten daily by the Germans. For years, you see, they've heard only Italian and German propaganda and to listen to the truth is, for many of them, a jolting awakening. What laborious, twisting ideals mankind invents. One of the strangest things is to realize that what each "nation" wants at heart is the same thing. Only I honestly feel that America is *free* in a sense that no other country is today. Above and beyond all the stupid flag waving at home, I appreciate the U.S.A. as I never have before. Tripoli is like a healthy convalescent who has been kept under a narcotic for years.

I ended my assignment with Colonel Beamish, a most pleasant association for me, the day before we quit Tripoli. When I went to his HQ. to say goodbye I was charmingly invited to visit him in England after the war, and he gave me several books as a present. All in all, I enjoyed the work with him very much as I heard a lot, saw a lot and thought a lot. I was extremely busy and had in three weeks, exactly two hours (of daylight) to myself! These were mostly spent getting adjustments

made at our garage. But it was definitely more interesting for me to be with the Colonel than cooped up with the squabbles of our own HQ. Oh, the pleasure of being "left alone!"

I had another stroke of good fortune in receiving a very pleasant fellow as my companion upon leaving the city. He was sent down from Syria with several other replacements; our section of five vehicles tossed and I lost—so I got a partner! The arrangement only lasted eight days when he was shifted to another section. He was a son of a munitions engineer, one brother lost at Wake Island, another a major in the paratroops in North Africa. He is most deeply interested in China and plans to finish his law training at the University of Chungking. Then if possible to Vienna for the School of International Diplomacy. Being twenty-two, all this is possible! He was torpedoed on his way out, landed in South America, flew home for a while, then set out once more, minus his contact lenses, two Leica cameras and many other treasures. All in all I found him a happy combination of vigour and laziness but still retains a goodly portion of the old man's ambition and initiative. It is so much more heartening than the pale, reservedness of the true aristocrat; unless, by some quirk of character, the azure blood is tainted with an unusual or peculiar verve.

We are parked on a long, slightly undulant plain, bulging with hillocks of white broom which gives off a clean, sweet fragrance. The sand is brown and rather soft, squared off here and there with primitive, typically Gallic little orchards of young olive trees. The natives wander through the camp trading eggs for tea. As a consequence, I breakfasted at home—two fried eggs, bacon, stale bread and *one* precious cup of Nescafé, unsweetened. From ten to four the sun is warm and the sky windless; we wear shorts and absorb as much vitamin D as possible.

For the time being our section, and two others, is at-

tached to our Field HQ. awaiting assignment. The group is almost static—now and then friends pop in for repairs, or a meal, or to buy at our small canteen. Life is very quiet, reposeful and I only wish I had a garden handy to work in. I'd have had the entire plot blooming long ago!

I was amused at your description of the censorship of my December 29th letter; a bit surprised at the pettiness of it, I must say. It was purely a personal matter, which somehow is strengthened by the omissions enforced! Oh, well, one must put up with things for the time being.

My health is fine and I am regaining some of my lost desert-pounds slowly. Here it is March and many Christmas packages have not yet arrived.

Received March 26th, 1943

HERE IT IS almost the Ides of March and, in retrospect, the months have flown past remarkably fast. I sometimes wonder how I shall adjust myself to common-place living, though that is our chief day-dream; a life devoid of sudden attacks, night marches of twenty minutes warning and the curious camaraderie of camp life. I have become so used to holding out my tin plate at various strange food queues that I know I shall resent and be startled at the prospect of having to pay for a meal once again. It is a lazy life, God knows, with long hours to wait, to write, to talk, and talk, and talk; then the quick arrival of a jeep with wounded men looking grey and frightened, or a lumbering English lorry full of shrapnelled Germans looking stoic in their pain. The little encampment springs to life, water is boiled, sterilized cutlery brought out in the flapping tent. For a while the odors of disinfectants and cigarette-smoke mingle in the warm spring air, the blankets are folded on the stretchers, we toss out our own paraphenalia into a heap—hoping the Dressing Station will still be there when we return from our run, which it sometimes isn't, due to the ebb and flow of battle—and await the bandaged passengers. Soon they are carried out, usually with Newell Jenkins talking to the prisoners in reassuring German (how I wish I could speak many tongues!). The beds are strapped in place, four to a car and, one by one, we are off to the next Posting Station which at the moment is the other side of a much battered village. Here the tourni-

quets are loosened, amputations made, operations performed, and men buried.

For the past two days the air overhead has been continually a-whistle with shells. Every hour one sees desperate dog-fights of planes overhead swooping and wheeling in the bright sky. Machine guns crackle in the clouds, the pursued dives deeply to evade the hail; sometimes the widening plume of black smoke is barely seen before the crippled wing collapses and the plane plummets spirally to the farm-land below.

The land here is gently undulant, the rich soil deeply ploughed and squared off by limestone walls. Some fields are planted in small olive trees, a few in budding figs whose thick green sprouts have a sure sign of familiar spring about them. Here and there a tall, languorous palm tree spikes the horizon and provides insufficient shade for the rough, stone graineries that top each hill. The peasants' huts are built of mud and rubble and they all resemble an old-fashioned cylindrical bread-mould, about fifteen feet long with an arched vault for a ceiling. The doors are low and the threshold high, one stoops to enter the dark, bad-smelling interiors. At each end a square cement couch, warmed by an oven beneath, enclosed the Arab families on cold nights. The natives have long since fled and you are more than likely to find three sergeants names chalked on the crude wooden door, ensconced within, safe from shrapnel, rain and, the truly awful Army "publicness."

Our position, it is early morning now, is a strange one. At dawn, I could hear an enormous amount of gunfire gathering momentum. In an hour we realized that the Germans were trying to press out of their triangle on *our* side. Very much as you one morning might hear cannon firing down by the Daisy Filling Station, half awake and crediting the distant tumult with a dream-like quality. I went back to sleep but soon the shaking in our field

prohibited any further slumber. It is difficult for me to write, and for you to read, this in its proper perspective; you must realize that the element of surprise or fear or horror has been aroused so many hundreds of times that, like "wolf! wolf!" the attack becomes a nuisance more than anything else. Men will doubtless eat their breakfasts staring up at the sky, or stepping aside to dodge the flying bits of shrapnel. But, otherwise, all is normal, all is calm, all is humdrum. The main reaction is always, "Those Bastards! Why can't they leave us in peace a few minutes?" No hate nor alarm.

Well, by eight-thirty the shells were whining overhead continuously. It takes longer than you'd think for their passage. You hear the German cannon five miles away, then the loudening whistle, overhead it becomes a mounting whine then a descending scale of nasty rushing through the air. It disappears over the next wall, one sees a sudden cloud of black smoke rise and then, curiously enough, the deafening roar is heard. Like the final fury it arrives seconds after the smoke. By night, of course, you first see a belch of orange fire in the distance, then the whine, and instead of the smoke column rising nearby, one is conscious of the earth shaking underfoot. My curiosity is satisfied on one point at last! There is time to review your entire life before the shell arrives, though I doubt if anyone thinks that concretely at such a time.

Last evening, two of us walked down the road (the lane that is common to both the Gerries and us) and walked up to the crest of a neighboring slope. Below us in the deepening dusk a tank-battle wheeled and attacked in furious dust. Modern war has no human quality—it is purely a matter of metal, gunfire and flames. One is often reminded of a giant, frightening factory, when the noise becomes intolerable. Over the valley unseen in the night, swarms of planes bombed the field of battle, lighting up

sections of the terrain with quick explosions. Little by little, the tanks were knocked out, the furor quieted, the Spitfires and Focke Wolfs whined homewards. I walked back to camp in pitch darkness, filled with a mingling of wonder and disgust. Unfortunately, I spent the rest of the evening looking at some stale *Life* magazines. Good God, how unreal and exaggerated the stories are! Even the advertisements bristled; this is a strange way to make the world a better place. If only, upon declaring war, each nation was forced to watch the *actualities* for a day or two, in stark realism.

I am nearer to Monseur Lung (Algiers) than I'd ever expected to be. Meanwhile I am fine. Being with the jolly New Zealanders at the moment, the food is better.

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Received April 30th, 1943

I AM SITTING in the sun on an old British blanket waiting for the order to move on. Our convoy is parked about on the rough slopes after a drive of fifty miles since dawn. The sun is high overhead now and beats down beneficently through the gentle spring breeze. It is uncertain how long we'll sit here so lazily. Newell has been off wandering through the hillside, returning with no less than twenty-two different species of flowers, though to look out one sees nothing but prickly shrubs and baked earth. We are at the head of a long valley through which the past week has passed so much horror and noise. Convoys are still trailing through the pass in a haze of white dust, now and then one hears an unlucky vehicle hit a mine, but all in all, the scene is a peaceful one. Most of the men are asleep in the shade of their trucks. We've had a cold lunch and a few miles ahead, through a soft notch of hills, the blue sea is beckoning. Oh, to get washed! I feel as if we had lately come out of a fearful gulch into open spaces, air and distances before us at last. This impression is due to the events of the past fortnight which evidently were somewhat off schedule. This particular assignment has been a hard nut to crack. It is, by the way, unnecessary for you to "wonder where you are tonight" for I am nearly always at the places mentioned in your evening's news broadcasts, with the Eighth Army of course. Tunis cannot be far away!

As I look across the rolling fields, there are dark green groves of trees, a few compounds and one bleating herd

of black and white goats. The native shepherds are already back in the hills, and donkeys trudge along the road once more, blinking wearily at the square little soldiers' cemeteries, and the blackened wrecks of lorries and tanks. How quickly the world forgets!

Everyone is either asleep or talking and laughing. It has to be that way I know.

* * *

We haven't been able to receive mail of course during the present push; but yesterday a big bag of letters and parcels was flown up over the lines to us. There was a magnificent box of candy from Schrafft's—a present from Woodstock! It was so well packed and the candies were in excellent shape, though in this climate any "hard" candy becomes automatically sticky. At any rate the box was a grand gift and the sweets were so rich and good. Four of us have been eating them all morning. It was fixed in three layers so each shelf is a different kind. It was evidently a Hallow'en assortment which, arriving toward Easter, as a Christmas present, was unique. Please thank the right people for me? There were no names. A wonderful letter from Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (she's sending me a package) and, a short thank-you note from Deems Taylor. Wasn't that heart-warming for me way out here so far from everything?

And now for some *real* news. I am still not sure of details so don't get your hopes up much, for anything may happen, BUT, I understand the AFS may send me to Burma. If so I'll be flown home for a month before sailing from New York. What do you think of that? I would do it of course, for I want to see India, and the chance to see home and you again is too much temptation. If I leave July 1st. it would take a week to fly home. Our flying priority has been recently lowered from Class 2 to

Class 4, so there is a good chance we'd have to go by boat. Even so I'd be home probably in August at that rate. Don't get too hopeful or change your plans for until I contact the Cairo office I cannot get positive information. And then, even that may change by June. But it is a delirious prospect and I spend hours thinking about it.

As to my health which you asked about. I haven't succumbed to the Army dentist yet (everyone tells me not to) I've lost a filling so I'll have it fixed in Cairo. I am quite tanned and I haven't the remotest idea what I weigh. I am very grateful for all the work you are doing for me. I'll certainly take my typewriter with me when I come home.

In the hurly-burly of writing from a field, I often forget, I fear, to say "thank you" for many thoughtfulnesses on your part, so don't think I don't appreciate them. Send me news about your weaving. It sounds grand.

The Indian Army job means you sign for "the duration plus one year or until emergencies are over" which is too vague for me to understand!

* *
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This is a hodge-podge letter written in most unbelievable spots and situations.

We are now camped in a wide even valley, the Tunisian hills cutting off the outside world in every direction. Behind us the ribbon of track winds into this basin of green land through tortuous gullies and long, rocky crevasses. Though we've been here two days the Germans are still in the surrounding hills; cannons boom sporadically and shells occasionally whistle overhead. At night the serried hills in the distance, at the edge of our plain, are lit up by bomb explosions or the sudden, glaring flash of big guns. Since the hills are in disorderly ranges one can see varied vistas illuminated momentarily, perhaps three or

four crests appear if the explosion is far back, or only the mountain facing us appears in the flash if the battle has surged closer. And yet in spite of the considerable tumult and thudding, the very serenity of the landscape halves the sense of strife. The low, quiet hills, the occasional clumps of shrubs, the little dry river-beds meandering through the valley—everything unites to dispel the feeling of mechanism and machines.

The ammunition trains crawl out of sight in the far hills and sometimes an officer in a jeep goes hurtling past with a message or instructions. But overhead the soft blue sky reflects the olive and golden meadows below. The grass is short and harsh, and the sprinkled flowers sport tough, short stems, coarse leaves and, sometimes, thorns. But the scarlet poppy-faces and pink raspberry-colored asters make up in intensity what they lack in abundance.

There had been a great deal of bombing, strafing and shelling, both while on the move down this valley and while camped at various stops. It may be because I am tired out and have seen more than in earlier days here, but the attack seems much closer home. As I have said Saber was hit by a bullet in his head yesterday. The day before one of our mechanics, a young English fellow named Eric Barnes was riding three trucks ahead of me on a break-down lorry. The convoy had stopped for a few minutes when a flight of German planes whizzed over the nearest hilltop, swooped down the long rows of vehicles and began firing. One hit the truck Eric was sitting in, scratched the boy next to him, and killed him. Having had him living in my ambulance for several periods, I had grown to like him and to know him better than the others of the Workshop Crew. He was a stocky, typically lower class English and the most cheerful and good natured fellow I've ever known. Reddish face, fine muscle and a shock of yellow hair over one eye, very much addicted to the ladies (how *glad* I am he had such

desperately wild sprees in the Tripoli bordellos!) Many's the time he worked over my car late into the night, trying to adjust some carburetor while I held a verboten flash light under a blanket for him. Once he worked by moonlight, in the desert outside Beni Ulid, where I had been stranded for two days. It was freezing cold and by 2 A.M. I finally persuaded him to quit for the night. He laughed and came inside where we had awful tea and bully biscuit.

At any rate, it was a numbing shock to find one so full of simple life and red blood, suddenly no more than a shovelled mound in this vast plateau, two crossed strips of packing-box to indicate that here lay Pvt. E. Barnes, #3478091. It was such a jolt to see so good a mixture of vitality and smiles and health reduced with such ghastly abruptness. But, as I have always felt, the pain exists only for the bystanders. I don't understand life, so naturally death seems very simple to me.

April 17th, 1943

I AM IN TUNISIA. You can see it is above the level of my previous stops, borders the Mediterranean and is a narrow Protectorate of France. All the towns are along the sea-coast. The climate, roughly speaking, is about like Georgia. There are many ranges of mountainous hills, some running into the water, other ones going northwards. They are crowned with ledgelike plateaux of low green shrubs, the rock layers of antiquity plainly visible through the action of wind and rain. As the hills descend, the grass becomes thicker and the wild flowers more numerous until at last the lands spill out into the cultivated olive groves which have yielded the prosperity of Tunisia since it was the powerful empire of Carthage two thousand years ago. From the many rolling hill-tops, criss-crossed with the lovely allées of ancient olives, one can see the land for miles in every direction. Excellent tarmac roads thread their way into the interior and along the coast, connecting the farflung plantations and villages with the harbours and narrow gauge railroads which all converge on Tunis, the capital.

Instead of fences, the Tunisians use stunning hedges of cactus, succulent and pale green, twisting upwards from leaf to leaf in fantastic eight foot borders. The entrance to a lane or grove is usually punctuated with a pair of giant yuccas. Within these fields the earth is carefully ploughed and furrowed, yielding a second usage in geometrical patches of radishes, winter wheat, rye or lush green turf for grazing. Shaggy camels pull the

ploughs while a little mule or donkey saunters about behind the farmhand, getting loaded with certain grasses which the Arabs use for food. In many sections the individual grove is terraced subtlety to minimize the hilliness. Thus cool square basins of land lie fallow under the gnarled olive trees. The towns and villages all have much in common; they are more or less halved into the Native Quarter and the modern French Rue Maginot and Boulevard de France. There is always a white Moorish Palais de Justice, the banker's house, the leading physician's, the pharmacis, the boulangerie, etc., all neat on tree-lined streets leading to the town hospital or the village pump. The Arab parts are always the same, and always fascinate me. Twisting, narrow streets, a cobblestone heart in the center of a whitewashed Kasbah of one-room houses, court-yards, single ancient trees and an occasional mosaic-cemetery of true Believers. The streets are always noisy, stinking and colorful, vendors yelling, children racing about, asses braying and all the other discordances one would expect. You can buy woolen strips, sandals, woven baskets, fresh leeks, white radishes, sweet coffee, rugs, bad meat, and fried cakes if you wander down the various shopfronts. Of course the natives around here are really farmers so that there is a refreshing vigor and stalwartness about them which is the opposite to the glamorous, be-kohled native of Cairo or Alexandria. Their humors are better and possess less subtlety but more dignity.

The main and deepest impression I have of Tunisia is a soft greenness, it is difficult to analyze why this is so; for there is a wild jumble of color on every hand. The country is not tropical, there is a certain hardness visible in tree trunk and land and rock, yet the haze of the olive grove softens and etherealizes everything. One looks down the white chalky cliffs to the blue sea through a vista of grey-green branches, the medley of spring flowers is tempered by the delicate greenery of the short grass

and the distance is blurred by the pale celdon of the hills. You must think of this as a very flat country, whose gentle swells and abrupt end in the sea would be lost in the magnificence of the Hudson Valley, for instance. I have grown so used to these lesser landscapes that it is hard for me to visualize the swooping rivers and towering mountains of America.

If you picture the ground as a close-shorn carpet, blended and diffused by the uniform green olive color you may perhaps be prepared for the riot of clashing color found in the flowers, which, under less masterful planning, would resemble a nigger holiday.

The plants are all low since the rainfall is minute, the sun always shining. Daisies grown in a spreading, Creeping-Charlie fashion, never more than two inches off the ground. They ramble around more like patches of Quaker Lady, not in banks as at home. They are cream, yellow and white. Also in white and pale peach is the wild garlic flower, about eight inches tall. In deep butter-color, there is a plant like a dog toothed violet, only with fuzzy fernish leaves. On the higher scale is a mass of rampant shades. Violent raspberry colored wild gladioli, clumps of bright blue asters, thick stalks of lobelia and Chinese forget-me-not and many varieties of mauve-to-purple stock, bluebell, lupin. Thistles which grow like giants, very prickly, scentless white hyacinths, curious blue Queen Anne's Lace, and finally, something you would love, is minute purple iris, the whole plant perhaps four inches high, but perfect in every detail. But above all these brilliant flowers and unique to this olive and white landscape are the limitless stretches of scarlet poppies. They are lovely beyond description with a curious dusty scent. Some grow in salmon shades, others veer off toward rose but the frank, beating tomato red is predominant. And like a Persian carpet, their scarlet motif fades and returns as I never would have thought possible in so blazing a

color. Only a country of great distances and olive haze could accommodate the poppies so beautifully. In a garden I would hate them.

I think these long vistas must be good for my eyes. I have become used to looking in every direction for at least three miles. Our own camp, dispersed through olive groves, often covers several slopes. Walking over to breakfast or tea, one wanders down long rising and falling lanes of broken sunlight, gray twisted trees and soft green leaves. Somehow I think of the oak allées of Hampton and Middleton Gardens, grown smaller and older.

You will be pleased to know I have plenty of eggs, onions, lettuce and bread now from wandering Arabs so we gorge on greens and omelets.

THE KHAMSEEN

THERE IS a terrible storm blowing. The dust and sand sifts through the windows into every tiny space, floats in one's mug, blends in the stew at mealtime. The atmosphere is thick and yellow, and one can see only a few yards away. The hills which I have described before are quite invisible and the whole plain seems to rise and fall with the incessant billows of sand blowing in. The dry waves come racing and leaping down over the land, here and there concentrating in whirling dervishes of spouting grit. At times a pale nimbus of sun glows murkily through the golden haze. It intensifies the heat and the arid wind-lashing.

The storm came slowly, first being nothing more than hot breezes from the Sahara. I noticed that I was becoming increasingly thirsty but the warm water of our rationed canteens did little to ameliorate the pangs. The dryness was in the air around us, absorbing every trace of moisture and sweat; so that though it grew blazingly hot one was always feverish and dry. The days seemed endless. I gulped and gulped but within a few minutes I was as thirsty as ever. The wind kept up for four days, dropping mercifully for a while at night but resuming in all its intensity each day at dawn. It was as if the scorching gales waited on the vast hot Sahara for the coming of day, to pour over the land in that pitiless blinding vacuum.

It was toward the end of the Khamseen that Winslow Martin dropped in from another camp in the valley. He had to prop the door open against the gale to get inside

the ambulance, and his skin was raw and sore from the sand's whipping. He sat down, looking very low, and presently inquired, "You heard about Randy Eaton, didn't you?" "No," I said, thinking of the kid who'd come over with him before. "What about him?" "He's dead," Win said, "got his back blown off by a shell this afternoon." He paused a minute, looking drawn and shaky, then he added censored This I hope will be my low water mark for uneasiness, for though it has little element of personal danger, yet somehow the ingredients of the story are terrifying to me.

The night the Khamseen began to abate, a few of us were moved five miles ahead to another Medical Dressing Station. It was Kirk Browning's birthday and Newell and Waring Hopkins decided to make a huge mess of cocoa in celebration. The three of them were fussing with a stove toward sunset when a dispatch rider rode up to my car and said an ambulance was needed at once.

I drove over to the operating tent and found Joe, already loaded with four stretcher cases. Not knowing the track to the airdrome, I asked him to wait a minute (he was stationed there) while I loaded. In a few minutes my four cases were ready and I looked at them before I closed the back door. The two on the floor looked like mummies under blankets. Nothing but swollen, sticky lips and bloody nose-tips showing. Their four hands were enormous stumps of gauze. They had been burned inside tanks. Above them one man with an elaborate Thomas splint on one leg, and a plaster cast on his right arm. Next to him, and likewise slung from the ceiling, a man with acute dysentery. Nothing out of the ordinary, but still, these eight men were the most serious cases and deemed necessary to have a night's rest at the distant airdrome-tent before being flown back to base the next morning. The rest of the cases would be driven over in the morning.

We started off, Joe leading the way. He had an orderly

with him, I was alone. It was fast getting dark, being about 7:30. We crawled along. I have never gone so slowly in my life. The whole trek was made in low-low which, on these trucks is an extra gear under low and means one to three miles per hour.

It was soon pitch dark, no moon until midnight, and the road barely visible. For more than an hour we ached along, me being about twelve feet behind Joe. He kept stopping and then moving on a few feet as though hunting his way. My eyes staring into nothingness began to react badly, I couldn't focus for more than a minute or two, and the back of the ambulance ahead seemed to shimmer and retreat vacantly like an object through the wrong end of opera-glasses. Finally, the combined double-vision and its attendant headaches produced a nauseous feeling. I kept up as long as I could but at the end of another hour, I honked at Joe and asked his man to drive my car a while so I could close my eyes. The orderly was standing on the roof as a lookout and Joe rather irritably told me to try a while longer. This I did. We moved on, down a terribly rocky path into a dry wadi. The boulders doubled the groans and moans of my poor patients to add to the sickness I felt.

At last Joe pulled up and climbed to a rock a few feet on one side to see what he could see. At the same time one of my helpless men wanted to go to the bathroom (one starts the others going!). In the midst of the necessarily complicated procedure in total blackness I heard a voice from Joe's ambulance calling weakly, "Hey, Yank!" I thought it was the New Zealander orderly and went over to look in. It turned out to be one of Joe's mummified cases wanting water. The water of course was under everything, the mug had disappeared and the patient couldn't swallow when finally I arranged the drink. All this time I was talking to the orderly in the front seat who seemed unusually silent, though mumbling while he

bustled himself with a bandage. At last I laid the burned man back on his bed and went around front to ask the orderly where Joe had gone. I got into the driver's seat and turned in the dark to the figure beside me. I noticed an unusually strong, sweet smell of medicines, and the man didn't answer me intelligently. I put my hand out and to my horror felt a bare shoulder next to me. The man was mumbling thickly by this time. I lit a match, against all regulations, and my dazed eyes fell on a quite naked Maori, clumsily engaged in pulling at his tight bandages. In his sulfanilimided trance he was ripping the coagulated blood and scabs off with the matted gauze. By some amazing determination he had gotten himself off the lower stretcher and over the back of the front seat. The swelling had made the bandages too tight, and he was even hacking at the plaster cast on his leg. I couldn't understand his thickened tongue and he was more or less oblivious of me. I grabbed a blanket and wrapped it around him, went over to the front door on his side and started to lift him out. But to add to this awful situation (remember this was all in total darkness) his plaster leg was firmly caught between the emergency brake and the four-wheel gear. To disengage this gear the car has to be in motion and I already had him half out of the car before I knew what was caught. At the exact proper moment he fainted.

As I propped him back on the seat, I heard a voice calling me "Inglesi? Inglesi?" Being Italian I didn't know what to answer, but at that moment Rommel himself would have been very welcome. It turned out to be a Black Senegalese guard who had heard me calling Joe earlier and honking my horn. Thank God, he spoke French, of course, so I told him to open the back and pull out the Maori's stretcher. We got the unconscious man back in bed again, then I sent him off for his officer. About 10:30 a captain came who spoke English so I felt

I was on the right keel at last. But still I needed someone to drive the other ambulance, either to the Free French camp, back to the Medical Dressing Station, or to the nebulous airport. I gave the officer a lesson on left-hand driving and we started off. But the combination of the rocky river-bed and the novice's stops and starts was too much. After about thirty feet of this he climbed out saying he couldn't stand the patients' groans. They were pretty awful by this time as the morphine was wearing off and they were getting panicky as they didn't know what was happening. They were so far gone that explanations didn't have much effect.

Somehow my sick feeling had vanished in the excitement and I felt very much the master of the situation. I always told you my life should have more emergencies!!

I asked the captain to take two men and go search for the airport which they assured me was within a short distance. Then, with one very kindly black Frenchman I set about talking and soothing my two carloads of patients. We busied ourselves for over a half hour. (I was so grateful for his simple, dark help that I emptied my pockets of all the Algerian franc notes I had!) Finally I heard a hallooing and presently the officer returned with a New Zealand driver. The airport tent was only about a half mile away but for all I could see it might have been in Hades. Not even a pin point of light to mark it. I pulled up to the waiting doctor's arms about 11:15 just four hours after we'd left the Medical Dressing Station. The entire trip was three miles.

Joe and the orderly had left their ambulance, motor-running, without a word to me and gone off to find the airdrome tent. They reached there all right and had then set out to come back to the ambulances. Having already sent us down the wrong turn in to a dead-end gulley, the directions they'd procured didn't apply and they had walked and walked until finally they reached our starting

point back at camp. There they got a third ambulance and set out again but by that time I'd maneuvered the little convoy safely to the airport.

Strange to say, the eight critical cases suffered no visible set-backs but I, Heaven knows, I felt like a major relapse!

29

G A B E S

ON BREAKING CAMP we by-passed Gabes. I could see the palm oasis in the distance and, near, the telegraph poles on the main highway. We continued past the outskirts of the town, then gradually headed back into the desert.

The only way to reach Sfax is through a narrow strip of land which stretches between the Mediterranean and the great salt marshes, impassable at all times, of Chott el Djebab. This group of saline lakes filters back almost to the borders of Algeria and makes, with the treacherous sands, a splendid barrier to any progress. But the lakes miss the sea by a scant fifteen miles and there is the only way to the coast. The main road and a narrow gauge railway both thread into this gap, coming out into ripening plains. On the other side was a veritable arsenal of Axis equipment, the tanks, planes, guns and men who had been falling back all the way from El Alamein and were packing back into Tunisia like a pressed accordion. As they retreated they coalesced the troops and gunfire all along the coast, becoming larger as they went back.

30

Received May 15th, 1943.

I AM SORRY I ever mentioned coming home as a possibility for it had been cancelled due to the Draft Board's refusal to guarantee exemption for the stay in America. This is the current rumor so it is all I know at the moment. I am anxious to have my typewriter, and feel it wiser to start it on its way now. I am writing to Mrs. De Maine and telling her you are sending my portable to the New York office. There she will see that some departing unit brings it along to the Cairo office. Please have it cleaned, re-ribboned, locked and plainly marked.

I have been frantic a hundred times this past year when I realized what magnificent pictures I was missing! I am getting an official British Photographers' Permit so all will be well if you can get me a good camera. I'll then be all set for India.

Am naturally heart-broken over not coming home but the less said the better. If only it *hadn't* been announced! They plan to re-form the existing groups so after this campaign is over, no one knows exactly what will happen. Probably an India-Syria-Egypt set-up but that is all hearsay.

It is 8 A.M. now and I've been up all night, being one of the two Duty Ambulances. We carry patients from one tent to another, or to the two operating tents. The operating teams are both very jolly so I spent a pleasant night, with cocoa every few hours. It is amazing to watch these elaborate, vital surgeries performed in a rough tent, with sterilization a major problem. We pick the etherized men

up and put them on the tables and sometimes fix up the corpses for morning burial.

Driving in the dark, over slit-trenches and half-hidden sleeping tents is an experience, believe me. Last night, I walked ahead of the ambulance feeling my way while Newell followed my cigarette light with the car.

One is able to snatch a bit of sleep during the actual operations, but this morning I have a *nuit-blanche* feeling which is evident in a desire to clear up various odds and ends. I want to get everything settled.

I have given up my car to a newcomer in the section, moved into a bivouac-tent and set up! As a spare driver for the others, I fill in whenever needed. It is a little calmer this way and I can eat more regularly.

We have been buying fresh asparagus, leeks and artichokes this week from the wandering farmers which, plus the good eggs, is quite sumptuous. You would have died laughing if you could have seen four of us trying to make Hollandaise out of olive oil, egg yolk and lemon extract. No wine here at all and I've given up ever expecting it for the Axis seem either to smash or steal it all. It's fun having the Americans with us now!

I was immensely flattered by your allusions to my writing style. I try hard to practice the best, in preparation. And I consciously try to find the one word, as you say, rather than three colorful adjectives. I hope you don't mind being experimented on!

A great rush, and confusion has just begun, so goodbye.

31

Received May 23rd, 1943

I AM WRITING more so that you will not worry than because I have any news. Have had hay-fever awfully lately but I have the consolation of several other sufferers here.

Am at Field HQ. but leave this afternoon to join those whom A.H. works so hard for at home. (French)

The climate continues to be wonderful though the best of the spring flowers is over. We swim in the Mediterranean at every chance so you can imagine how warm it is—even in the mountainous places.

If I was sure a birthday cable would reach you, Alice and Aubrey, on your respective days, I'd have sent you one, but all three of you will know how affectionately I am thinking of you on the 4th and 6th. I have at last gotten a snapshot for you and as soon as the prints arrive I'll mail you one. Had a partridge-egg omelet yesterday! Forgive this short note, my cold is responsible.

This is the last letter Caleb Milne wrote before starting off with a small group of American Field Service men who responded to the call for volunteers to help the French. These Fighting French, under General Leclerc, had joined General Montgomery's 8th Army after that epic march from Lake Chad in Central Africa to Tunisia. They were fighting desperately against the main German force that blocked their advance in the mountains above Enfidaville. These volunteer stretcher-bearers went under fierce fire to remove the wounded. Early the morning of May 11th Caleb Milne was giving aid to a wounded Legionnaire when he was struck by a mortar shell. Porter Jarrell and three Legionnaires carried him down the mountain. One was a Spaniard, one a German and one an Italian, veterans of the International Brigade in Spain. His wounds proved fatal and he died around 4:30 that afternoon.

Newell Jenkins, his constant companion wrote: "He is buried just a few miles north of the village of Sidi-bou-Ali on a little rise to the left of the road, in a place where we had worked together for many weeks. He was covered with the Union Jack. Caleb loved that spot not far from the sea, rich wheat fields and olive groves about it, that lazy white Arab village around the bend, cactus hedges now all in bloom with saffron-colored flowers, and, in the distance the mountains where he was wounded, doing more than his duty, and not making any fuss about it. We have been told that he is up for a citation."

The letter that follows was left with a friend to be given to his mother should he be killed. This letter is included, although a very personal one, with the thought that its message might reach beyond one mother.

* * *

I WISH THERE WAS SOMETHING I could say or do to make the next few days less unhappy and lonely for you. Perhaps the love and devotion of my heart that is filling this letter will reach out and be able to fill these pages so strongly that a measure of peace and closeness betwixt us will fill the empty feeling. Not for me, but for you. For it is the one who must bear the au revoir alone, that the sad tears fill up in my eyes. I am not in the least unhappy for myself, and I beg of you not to be. I have had the rare pleasure and joy of living my life almost completely as I have wanted to—and it has been, and is a vivid, amazing, wonderful world so full of winter and spring, warm rain and cold snow, adventures and contentments, good things and bad—that the experiences already crowded into my days have answered every wish and need of mine for fullness and plenty.

You know my philosophy of life well enough; and yet it has, I have at last realized, a contradiction to me, death is a Nirvana, peace, nothingness. I do not want eternity or a never-ending Heaven. I do not want to live forever—the past has been splendid enough in the intricacies of living which I have so loved.

And yet, to live on in the hearts of those I love, and who have given me so unsparingly of their love through the years, is a “hereafter” that makes me very happy and alive. The ideas, the emotions, the large and little things that were the essence of me, are still bright and potent.

The music of a piano playing, rainy nights in spring, laughter and its attendant absurdities, fine books and warm hearts surround you and are always near you. And I am there all the time, part of them and part of the world we both love. Do you remember how Bonnemamma found her mother many times in a curiously quivering leaf upon some wayside bush? How often you will have me near you when wood-smoke drifts across the wind, or the first tulips arrive or the sky darkens in a summer storm.

So much of life is imagination: an empty room is lonely only in your mind, and an old suit forlorn only through an intellectual process. Think of me today, and in the days to come, as I am thinking of you *this minute*, not gone or alone or dead but part of the earth beneath you, part of the air around you, part of the heart that must not be lonely.

It seems curious that all the thoughts I have had, all the emotions I have felt, all the songs I have heard, the colour and zest of living I have known will not leave a trace of themselves. Yet my life has been an intensely personal one that is part of my friends and the people I love. Being forgotten isn't very important if the ideals and thoughts that one was made of go on and keep alive.

Oh, my dearest, I hug you and hold you near. Be happy, as I am! I am so close to you, and always will be. Will you split a kiss with Fred and Aub, and a hug for the dogs? We must keep the garden blooming and the driveway neat; and in the spring, some new bulbs and a few more fragrant shrubs.

And I am hoping this letter will be for you as a seed catalog in January!

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